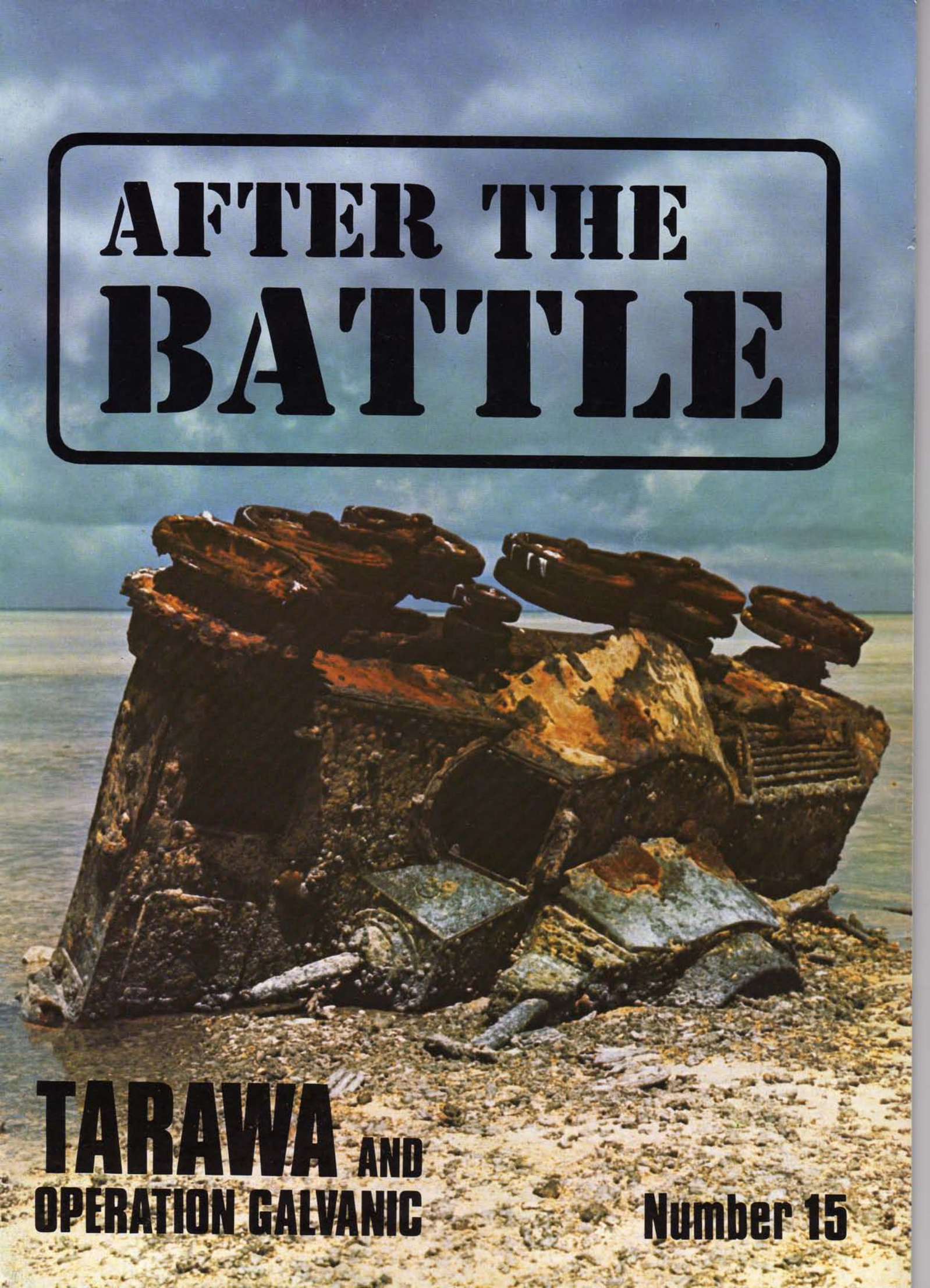
AFTER THE BATTLE



TARAWA AND OPERATION GALVANIC

Number 15

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Front cover: A Japanese Type 95 tank on the lagoon beach at Tarawa; believed to be the same one that was immobilised beside the command bunker of Rear-Admiral Keiji Shibasaki on Betio Island, Tarawa Atoll. (Bartsch)

Centre Pages: Recovery of the Churchill AVRE at Graye-sur-Mer, Normandy. Captain North watches Sergeant Poulter adjust a cutting torch. The cables at the rear were used to hold the fascine secure before its release. In the background, the two AEC 'wreckers'.

Back cover: The wreck of a Japanese 'Emily' flying boat lying on the lagoon beach of Butaritari Island, Makin Atoll. (Bartsch)

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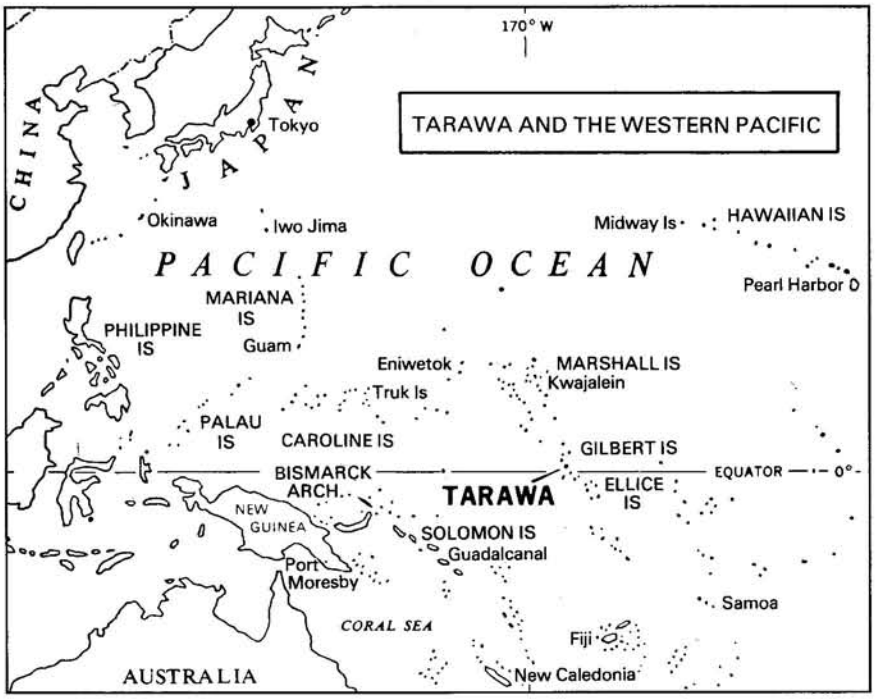
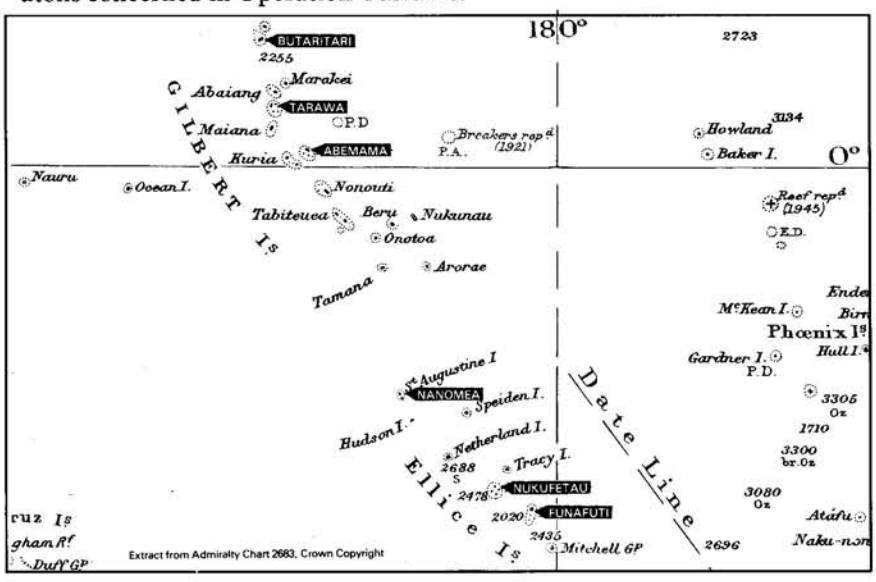


In November 1974, William H. Bartsch, at the time a United Nations International Labour Office Advisor on Manpower Planning to the Government of the Fiji Islands in the Pacific, was able to make a journey to six of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands that were involved in the Pacific War: Tarawa, Abemama, and Makin (or, more correctly, Butaritari) in the Gilberts, and Funafuti, Nukufetau, and Nanomea in the Ellice. Planning for the trip from his base in Suva, some 700 miles south of the southernmost island destination, Funafuti, was quite complicated. It involved a flight to Funafuti, timed to link up with a Gilbert and Ellice Islands Development Authority (GEIDA) ship departing for Nukufetau, Vaitupu, Nui and Nanomea, and then continuing to Tarawa. From there, he planned to fly to Makin and Abemama for three-day visits, and then return from Tarawa to Fiji by jet. The trip required perfect coordination, as he had only three weeks at his disposal. In particular, the boat connections were critical, since of the Ellice Islands (which gained self-government on October 1, 1975 and became the British Dependency of Tuvalu) only Funafuti, the administrative centre, is served by air; the other islands are only visited irregularly by ships of GEIDA for a few hours at a time to discharge and take on cargo. Remaining behind when the ship left would mean that he would be marooned for months until the island was visited again by a GEIDA vessel, the only ones plying the islands.

William Bartsch's personal commentary on his trip and the photographs he took provide a fascinating postscript for each of the islands and atolls concerned in Operation Galvanic.



OPERATION GALVANIC

Shortly after the beginning of the Pacific War in December 1941, with the US Pacific Fleet seriously weakened, Japanese forces had occupied the Philippines, Guam, and the Gilbert Islands. They had an outpost almost halfway to Hawaii on Wake Island, and had captured Malaya, Burma and the Netherlands Indies. They were also established in the Bismarck Archipelago-New Guinea-Solomon Island area. They held an enormous 'spiders-web' of foward bases in the Central Pacific from their own, mandated Caroline, Marshall and Mariana Islands in the north, to the British Gilbert Islands in the south.

On May 5, 1942, Japanese headquarters ordered the occupation of the Midway Islands (the first stepping-stone to Hawaii) and the western Aleutian Islands between Russia and Alaska in the north. In the south they had their eyes on the Fijis, Samoa and New Caledonia. If the southern islands could be captured, it would result in the line of communication between Australia and the United States being cut.

However, the Japanese had advanced too far, too fast. In May they were checked in their attempt to capture Port Moresby (not 200 miles from north-east Australia), in the Battle of the Coral Sea and the following month soundly defeated in what was virtually a carrier versus carrier naval encounter at the Battle of Midway. Thus crippled, the Japanese fleet was no longer capable of offensive action and orders to attack other Allied bases were postponed for two months before finally being cancelled in favour of an overland attack on Port Moresby from the rear.

In July, the Joint Chiefs of Staffs ordered Allied forces to advance through the Solomons and New Guinea and, although the lengthy Guadalcanal and Papua campaigns which followed dragged on until 1943, they succeeded in halting the Japanese advance. By now, the Allies felt confident in considering the possibility of further, offensive action.

At the Casablanca conference in January 1943, despite British fears that any increased Pacific action might adversely affect the German war, the Americans secured agreement for offensive action through the Central Pacific area in 1943. This decision was confirmed at the Washington conference held in May between President Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and the Combined Chiefs of Staff and Admiral Chester Nimitz, Commander of the Pacific Fleet, was directed to draw up a strategical plan.

At first it was planned to make a landing in the centrally-placed Marshall Islands but, after further consideration, it was agreed that the Marshalls should be approached from the south through the Gilbert Islands. Admiral Ernest King (Chief of Naval Operations), agreed the plan but complicated matters by ordering the inclusion of isolated Nauru Island, nearly four-hundred miles to the west.

Top: **Amtracs lie on Red Beach 1 after the battle to capture Betio Island, Tarawa Atoll (IWM).** *Above:* **A rusting amtrac on Red Beach 1 today (Bruce Adams).**

Rear-Admiral R. K. Turner was to command the amphibious force and Major-General H. M. Smith the landing troops. It was obvious to the latter that Nauru Island with hundred-foot cliffs would be too risky for the limited forces available and after a conference at Pearl Harbour on September 24, 1943, Admiral King relented. Makin, a small atoll in the north of the Gilbert chain (previously raided by the US Marines on August 16, 1942), would replace it but the major attack would go in on Tarawa Atoll, a hundred miles to the south. A third, minor landing was planned another seventy-six miles southward on Abemama Atoll. Admiral Nimitz code-named the project 'Operation Galvanic'.

The US Island Bases

FUNAFUTI ATOLL

The Japanese reaction to the hit-and-run raid on Makin in August 1942 was to reinforce their forces on both that island and Tarawa. As it was believed that the Japanese would move forces south to occupy the Ellice Islands, the Americans decided to occupy Funafuti Atoll, some 700 miles south of Tarawa, to head off this threat.

On October 2, 1942, elements of the 5th Marine Defense Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel George F. Good of the United States Marine Corps landed on the small atoll in 'Operation Fetlock'. They had been transported from Samoa in four ships escorted by the cruiser *Chester* and a number of destroyers. The atoll had not been occupied by the Japanese and they landed to an enthusiastic welcome from the natives and New Zealand Army garrison consisting of a lieutenant and one corporal!

The Navy immediately began dredging Te Buabua Pass and buoying shoals so that the lagoon could eventually accommodate over a hundred ships. Meanwhile, the Second Naval Construction Battalion, the 'Seabees', began to construct an airstrip on the island of Fongafale (the only piece of suitable land), and this was operational within a month.

Japanese reaction to the US build-up on Funafuti did not take place until March 27, 1943, when six Mitsubishi G3M 'Nell' bombers left Tarawa for a daylight strike on the atoll. Twenty-eight miles northwest of Funafuti, the Japanese aircraft were intercepted by two Grumman Wildcats of the newly-arrived Marine Fighter Squadron 441, and, in the ensuing combat, one 'Nell' was shot down and the others withdrew without attacking the base. During the following eight months, Funafuti was subjected to six more air raids from Japanese bombers staging through Tarawa and from Nauru Island to the northwest, all during darkness to avoid the protecting Marine fighters, which were not equipped for night fighting. Although the tiny island of Fongafale provided scant protection for US personnel and planes, the raids did not cause much loss of life or aircraft.

US offensive operations from Funafuti commenced on April 20, 1943, when twenty-two B-24 Liberator bombers of the Seventh Army Air Force, led personally to Funafuti from their base in Hawaii by its commander,

Above: **A reflective serviceman looks out to Funafuti's lagoon from the seaplane ramp on Fongafale Island built by the Second Naval Construction Battalion (Naval Construction Battalion Center).** *Below:* **In November 1974, William Bartsch photographed the seaplane ramp as it is now, its cracked concrete serving as a pier on which Funafuti children play.**

Above: **Remains of the Douglas C-47 that was hit by Japanese bombers from Nauru during their raid on Funafuti on November 17, 1943 (USAF).** *Below:* **Thirty one years later, the twisted wreckage of the C-47 lies just off Funafuti's airfield in a mangrove swamp, where it was evidently dumped following the plane's destruction (Bartsch).**

Major-General W. H. Hale, struck Nauru, the first raid on that Japanese base 870 miles north-east of Funafuti. In retaliation for this attack, nine 'Nells' from Tarawa bombed Funafuti for the first time in the early hours of April 21, destroying two aircraft and killing six men. When the alarm was sounded, the 680 islanders sought refuge in the palm-thatched church. Corporal F. B. Ladd successfully persuaded them to leave the church and shelter in the dugouts; ten minutes later a bomb dropped through the church roof completely blasting the interior.

Following the Japanese attack, only twelve B-24s were available for the scheduled raid on Tarawa which was advanced to the evening of April 21. Upon completion, 'Hale's Handful' beat a hasty retreat back to Hawaii.

In August, Vice-Admiral Spruance, Fifth Fleet Commander, personally visited Funafuti during his investigation to assess the best method of transporting troops safely across a fringing coral reef; a problem which had to be solved as virtually every Pacific island was surrounded by one.

Prior to the amphibious landings of Operation Galvanic on November 20, 1943, Liberators, Catalinas and Venturas from Funafuti carried out both photographic reconnaissance and bombing missions of both the Gilbert and Marshall Islands, dropping 75 tons on Tarawa and Makin. Advance headquarters for the Seventh Army Air Force was operational on the island by November 6.

Funafuti together with Nandi in the Fiji group, was chosen as a commercial oil tanker anchorage, where fleet oilers could top up their own tanks while refueling the invasion fleet. Thereafter it was to be a victualing depot for the ships after the landings.

WILLIAM BARTSCH WRITES . . .

The first leg of my trip posed no problem; Funafuti was easily reached after a three-hour, 700-mile flight from Suva on the Hawker-Siddeley 748 turbo-prop of Air Pacific. Historically, it was also logical the trip should begin here, for Funafuti was the spring-board of the great Central Pacific drive that inexorably drove the Japanese back to their home waters and ultimate defeat.

Funafuti affords the largest and deepest lagoon of Tuvalu, a major factor in selecting it to be developed as an American base, in October 1942, viewed only as a foothold against the Japanese in the Central Pacific. In the event, however, Funafuti proved more important as an air base, following the completion of its crushed coral airstrip a few months after occupation by the Marines and Seabees. The airfield proved the most valuable legacy of the war, today providing the main link with the outside world for the atoll's 900 inhabitants.

The four days at my disposal until the arrival of the GEIDA vessel from Suva were more than sufficient to explore the atoll's main island of Fongafale, where the US (and, subsequently, New Zealand) forces were based and the site of the airfield. Fongafale is only eight miles long and half-a-mile wide at its widest, providing the opportunity for a thorough inspection of war remains.

The main relic of the war is the airfield itself, stretching 5,200 feet across the island. After the war it was replanted with coconut palms but, in 1962, they were chopped down and the airstrip put into service again. It attests to the quality of the work of the Seabees that 33 years later the field should be in good enough condition that it could meet the demands of multi-engined prop aircraft.

Although several US aircraft were destroyed on and near the strip by Japanese air raids in 1943, the remains of only one are to be found today, those of a twin-engined Army C-47 transport lying in a mangrove swamp a few meters to the east of the airfield, a victim of the Japanese raid of November 17, 1943, the last air attack on the atoll. Just off the end of

Left and above: **In November 1942, Marines were busy building this observation post on Fongafale Island, Funafuti (Marine Corps). It stood for thirty years before Hurricane Beebe blew it down in 1972 (Bartsch).**

the airstrip, beyond the reef in deep water, lie the hulks of two B-24 Liberator bombers and their entombed crews, the result of take-off accidents after midnight on June 28, 1943 for a bombing raid on Nauru. It is not likely they will ever be dived on, however, as the depth of the ocean falls off steeply just 300 yards out to 150 fathoms!

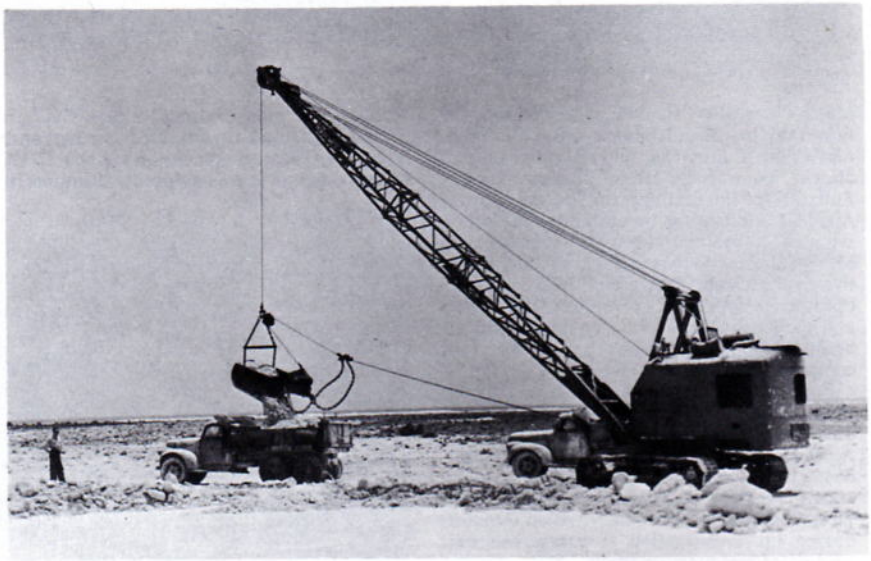
In order to provide fill for the construction of the airfield, tons of coral were excavated from the north and south ends of Fongafale by cranes using drag lines. Such excavations left long, deep, wide pits that today still scar the island. Into these 'borrow pits' was dumped the equipment no longer needed by the US forces when they withdrew from the island: boiler tanks, vehicle chassis, tires, spare parts, propellers, and even Coke bottles. Today, this junk still lies rusting in its final resting place, constituting an eyesore for an otherwise typical coral atoll.

There are numerous quonset (Nissen) huts along the length of Fongafale covered with coral rubble and vegetation to protect and hide them from Japanese attacks. They served as storage areas and operations posts, though nothing has been left inside them to indicate their specific use during the war. The old observation tower is also still there, though lying on its side following its confrontation with a hurricane in 1972.

On the lagoon shore of Fongafale a rusted Northwest crane lies on its side, the heaviest piece of equipment used in construction activities on Funafuti. A second one, still intact and upright, is just off the side of the road leading north on Fongafale. How strange that these two engineering products of Green Bay, Wisconsin, should survive today on a tiny coral speck in the vast Central Pacific!

Near the overturned crane, the cracked remains of a 30-foot concrete seaplane ramp extends out into the lagoon. During the war it could handle PBY Catalina flying boats based at Funafuti, but today only serves as a pier for children to play on.

My link with the other Ellice islands, the MV 'Nareau', arrived from Suva only one day behind schedule. It soon transpired, however, that I had no cabin; the little 'Nareau' was substituting for the larger 'Nivanga' (which had sprung a leak) and she could not accommodate all the passengers booked for cabins, together with the others that had boarded at Suva. No problem, however, as the captain, Loto Pasefika, insisted I take his cabin, despite my protests. As an Ellice Islander, he preferred the fresh air afforded by sleeping on the deck. There was no sleeping, however, until we negotiated the treacherous North Pass of the vast lagoon after midnight with the help of the ship's radar.



Above: **A Northwest crane loads coral on Motolalo Island, Nukufetau, in late 1943, probably for construction of the airstrip on the island (Naval Construction Battalion Center).** *Below:* **Another Northwest crane, this one on the lagoon shore of Fongafale Island, Funafuti, in 1974, lying overturned; rusting to its final disintegration (Bartsch).**

NUKUFETAU ATOLL

Up to July 1943, Funafuti was the only island in the Ellice group being used as an airbase and, in order to strengthen American control of the air, Admiral Nimitz issued instructions in August for the occupation of other islands suitable for airfield construction.

One of the two selected was Nukufetau Atoll, less than fifty miles to the north and 650 miles south of Tarawa. An advance party of the 2nd Marine Airdrome Battalion landed on August 22. After selecting a suitable site on the only large piece of dry land on the atoll, the island of Motolalo, the main construction troops landed five days later and, by October 9, the strip was ready for use.

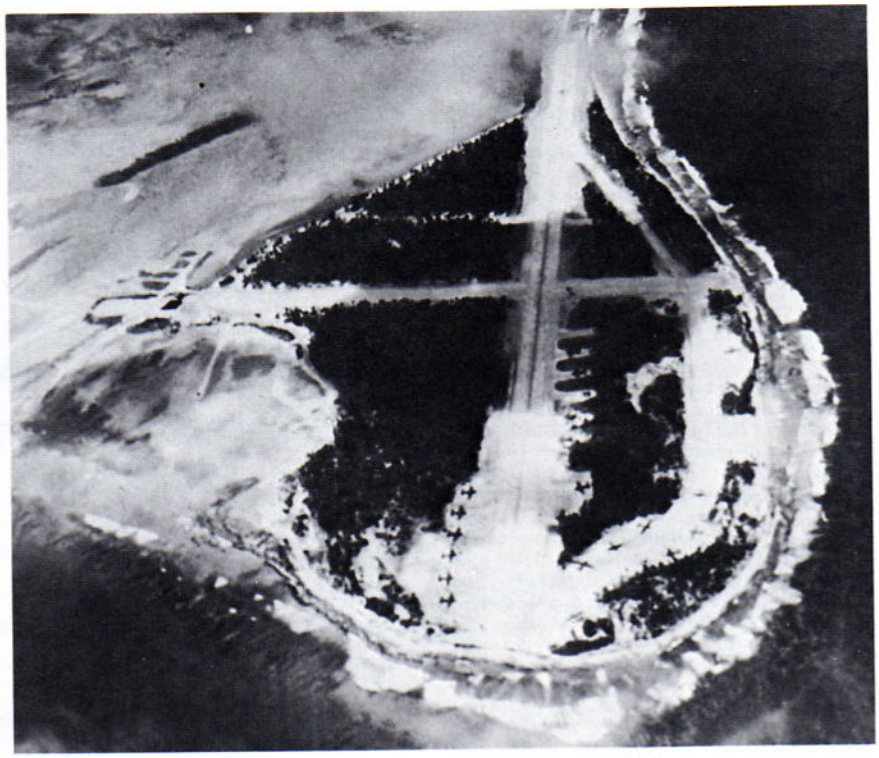
We reached Nukufetau Atoll, our first destination, in the early morning of November 5, a trip of only 43 miles northwest from Funafuti. The 'Nareau' entered the lagoon of the rectangular-shaped atoll from the west at Teafua Pass.

After anchoring in Nukufetau lagoon, near the main inhabited island of Savave, we were given the ship's launch to travel over to the long and narrow island of Motolalo, about 5 miles opposite the lagoon entrance, which was where all the US forces were concentrated on the atoll following US occupation in August 1943. But first we picked up an interpreter/guide from Savave who could take us to war remains on the island. The captain of the 'Nareau' had also lent us the use of the launch operator and an engineer with a walkie-talkie, in case something should go wrong. We were only given the afternoon for our explorations, for the 'Nareau' was scheduled to proceed at sundown after completing the unloading and loading of minor cargo and mail.

Landing on the lagoon side, near the southern tip of Motolalo, we immediately started a search for war relics in the area of the bomber and fighter strips. We soon discovered that we were the only people on the island; now, as in 1943, Motolalo is uninhabited and serves only as a coconut plantation for the 600 inhabitants on the other islands of the atoll. After a ten-minute walk, in oppressive heat, we came upon the old airstrips, still in good condition after 30 years of disuse, though largely overgrown with salt bush and coconut palms. Such preservation is a credit to the quality of work of the 16th Construction Battalion (Seabees) which, in 40 days had constructed out of coral a 2,850 foot fighter strip east-west across the island and a bomber strip 5,000 feet long lying north-south (subsequently extended), plus hardstands and other facilities. Our search revealed nothing in the way of permanent structures as the Seabees had been charged with building a temporary base only, with the men housed in tents and administrative buildings of coconut logs. The only trace of the former residents were two stone-lined wells and the concrete foundations of the buildings where the repair facilities used to be. Despite the fact that the airfields handled up to 34 four-engined bombers and 45 fighter planes, absolutely no trace of aircraft wreckage was found in the area of the airbase.

In addition to the airfield and facilities for air force units, the Seabees, with a detachment of the 7th Marine Defense Battalion, built a jetty on the lagoon side of Motolalo for discharging wartime cargoes. Returning to our launch, we passed up the side of the island to the site of the jetty, still intact though deteriorated. Lying near the jetty was the rusting wreckage of a small landing craft, including its propeller, and an iron chain and a shell casing.

Leaving the jetty, we took the launch further up the lagoon coast of the island to a point about 200 meters above the beacon on the northern extremity of the island, known as



Above: **At least 22 aircraft can be distinguished on the bomber strip and in revetments on tadpole-shaped Motolalo island, Nukufetau, in this late 1943 aerial view of the base (Naval Construction Battalion Center).**

Above: **In 1971, the island had reverted to its pre-war uninhabited state, but the traces of the old bomber and fighter strips are still evident in this aerial view from 5,000ft (Directorate of Overseas Surveys).**

Kongoloto Motolalo. Here we disembarked and walked about 100 meters inland through the bush to an open area which was the approach to the bomber strip. Our guide had led us to the most interesting war relic on Nukufetau: the wreckage of a large aircraft strewn over a wide area. We eagerly set-to, pulling off the salt bush that has partly overgrown the scattered wreckage during the past thirty years and discovered, piece by piece, the components of a B-24 Liberator bomber: two engines with propellers, two engines without propellers, the nose turret, part of the fuselage, the two wings (with the US insignia in colour still visible, though faded), and a rusted machine gun alongside spent and unspent ammunition. But our search failed to turn up the major part of the fuselage with the cockpit, the tail, or the wheels, and thus no serial number with which to trace the plane. Our suspicion that this Liberator had crashed short of the bomber strip was recently confirmed by records of the Seventh Air Force, which indicate that a B-24D of the 26th Bombardment Squadron, lost its hydraulics on January 7, 1944, and crashed in attempting to land at Nukufetau. Since only two B-24s were lost on Nukufetau, and the other one rolled off the southern end of the strip into the ocean (on November 23, 1943, on return from a mission over Jaluit in the Marshalls), our B-24 must have been the one of January 7, 1944. The wide dispersal of the wreckage is explained by the fact that, according to Seabee records, the crashed B-24 was accidentally blown up by Air Force personnel who were trying to salvage it.

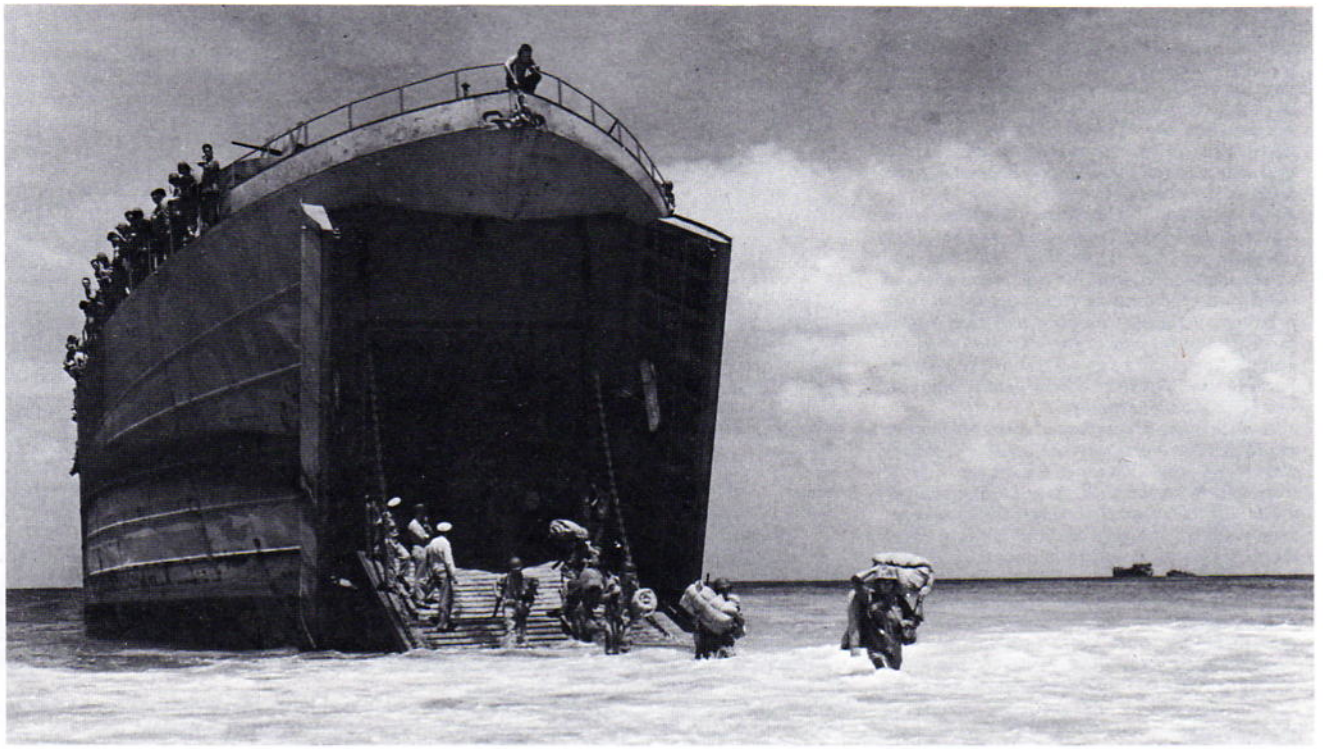
After leaving Nukufetau, 'Nareau's' next destination on its northward course was the island of Niutao, which unlike the other Ellice has no lagoon; consequently we had to anchor off the island in the open sea. Niutao was not involved in the war and would thus offer nothing in the way of war remains, so we did not disembark. During the night, we had passed by the atoll of Nui, which does have war remains, though it also was not involved directly in the war.

A B-24 safely crash-landed there in April 1943 in one foot of water on the lagoon reef at the islet of Unimai and, according to the island people, its scattered wreckage, including the four engines, is still to be seen. In addition, the wing from a twin-engined Mitsubishi G3M 'Nell' Japanese bomber on a patrol mission from Tarawa, which was intercepted off the atoll and shot down by a Grumman Wildcat of Marine Fighter Squadron 441 from Funafuti in August 1943, is on the island, as well as the remains of one of the seven Japanese crewmen which were retrieved from the wreck to be buried by the islanders in Nui's graveyard.

Above: **William Bartsch's interpreter and guide from Nukufetau's main inhabited island of Savave pose at one of the two stone-lined wells used by US forces on Motolalo Island.**

Above: **The disintegrating hulk of the landing craft and other associated debris on the beach near the jetty at Motolalo Island, Nukufetau (Bartsch).**

Right: **The wing of the B-24 wreck located at the northern extremity of Motolalo Island.** *Above:* **Live and spent cartridges lie alongside the heavily-rusted machine gun uncovered at the site (Bartsch).**



NANOMEA ATOLL

The other airfield location was selected on Nanomea Atoll, which lay only 460 miles south-east of Tarawa, at the northernmost ends of the Ellice group. On August 18, an advance survey party landed to determine if it was occupied by the Japanese and, if not, to reconnoitre a site for an airfield. No Japanese were discovered and, ten days later, the main party consisting of the 7th Marine Defense Battalion and a detachment from the 16th Naval Construction Battalion landed on the atoll. By September 7, work was well advanced on a 5,000ft runway and, by the end of the month, the airstrip was fully operational. It was guarded and serviced by 2,300 men.

On September 10 1943, Nanomea suffered its first Japanese air attack from ten 'Betty' bombers but little damage was inflicted. In order to deter further Japanese raids on Nanomea and the other Ellice bases, a heavy carrier strike was launched by Admiral Pownall's Task Force 15 against Tarawa and Makin on September 18-19, 1943, which resulted in the destruction of half of the Japanese bombers at Tarawa and four 'Emily' patrol bombers at the Makin seaplane base. Tarawa was never again used as an airbase for raids on the Ellice, although Nauru continued to serve as a staging post for such attacks up to November 1943.

By the eve of the invasion of the Gilberts, the Seventh Air Force had five bases within striking distance of the islands. Funafuti, Nukufetau and Nanomea each holding two bomber squadrons; Canton in the US-held Phoenix Islands where one bomber, one fighter-bomber and one fighter squadron were stationed, and one fighter squadron on Baker Island, a US possession about 500 miles to the east of Tarawa.

Less than fifty miles to the north of Baker Island, an emergency strip with an interesting history had been prepared on Howland Island. The 2,400ft airstrip had been prepared for Amelia Earhart in 1937. Early in the war it had been bombed by the Americans so that Japanese aircraft could not use it and later by the Japanese to deny its use to the Americans. However both sides had aimed badly and it was soon repaired for emergency landings.

Top: **LST-203 discharging Marines from the 7th Marine Defense Battalion on the LST's first landing at Nanomea on September 4, 1943 (US Marine Corps).** *Above:* **LST-203 today, the ramp doors of the rusted hulk still open after 31 years on the reef (Bartsch).**

In my preliminary research on the existence of war remains in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, I had been informed by the District Commissioner for the Ellice Islands at Funafuti that the most spectacular war relic in the Ellice was a large landing craft on the reef at Nanomea, 235 miles north-west of Funafuti. Later, I ran across a reference in the Atoll Pioneer (the local newspaper of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony), of 'the conspicuous wreck of a USN landing craft' two miles north-west of the southern end of Nanomea.

Thus, as we approached Nanomea from the south on the early morning of November 7, 1974, I searched up and down the western side of the atoll for a sign of this mystery ship. Gradually, a small speck grew larger as we approached the atoll and revealed itself as some sort of ship, but what kind? If it indeed were a landing craft, what type?

We did not investigate the ship from the ocean side as the 'Nareau' passed by to approach the lagoon entrance, intending to explore it from the beach, since it lay in shallow water not far offshore.

To enter Nanomea's lagoon, one must go by small boat through the 1,500-foot long man-made passage through the reef at the north-west side of the atoll. Since there is no natural reef entrance to the lagoon, late in 1943, the Seabees blasted through four to eight feet of hard coral to make a passage 60 foot wide and six foot deep; adequate to allow LCTs and other small craft to pass through and unload on the lagoon shore. It is now largely silted up,

described the unusual beaching procedure for LST-203 at Nanomea, the first time such methods had been tried at the atoll. On arrival, the commanding officer of the ship would drive the ship's bow onto the lip of the western reef at a particular point at high tide — when two to four feet of water covered the reef — and hold the ship there by forward power until the tide ebbed enough to allow the weight of the ship itself to hold the LST on the reef lip. When unloading operations were completed, she would be backed off the reef at high tide for the return trip to Funafuti.

However, on its fifth voyage to Nanomea, LST-203's luck ran out. As indicated in the records, on September 28-30, 1943, after unloading its cargo, (49 Seabees and 83 men of Marine Fighter Squadron 441 assigned to the air defense of Nanomea, and 13 Marines) its commanding officer, Lieutenant Fred W. Nirschel, of the US Coast Guard Reserve, began attempts to back the ship off the reef as the tide began coming in — the usual procedure. However this time, heavy surf and ground swell was pounding the ship's bow onto a coral head of the reef which punctured the hull in the bottom of the bilge control room. This caused the bow to act as a pivot and due to the heavy surf and the strong current running parallel to the reef in a westerly direction, the ship began swinging to port. During the next sixteen days, all attempts to pull the LST off the reef, using cables from the destroyer USS Manley, minesweepers USS Kingfisher and Robin, and LST-24, failed. Indeed, LST-203's situation worsened during this period, as further punctures on the coral head resulted in more flooding and heavy seas drove the ship a further eighty feet onto the reef.

Finally, on October 17, 1943, Nirschel was ordered to salvage all equipment possible and to strip the ship above the tank deck. All the gear was removed with the assistance of Seabees and Marines on Nanomea, including three auxiliary engines and generators. Upon completion of the salvage, LST-203's personnel were ordered to report to LST Flotilla 5 for a new assignment.

Navy authorities ruled that the stranding of LST-203 was 'the result of a hazard of military operations and was not occasioned by any negligence on the part of the commanding officer'. Indeed, Lieutenant Nirschel received a Naval citation a year later 'for skilful and effective performance of duty' in accomplishing 'numerous landings upon an extremely dangerous reef under very unfavorable conditions' and 'in all cases speedily delivered LST-203's cargo intact'.

Viewed from Nanomea's shore, the landing ship in November 1974 still shows the configuration of a LST, with the bridge far aft (Bartsch).

After examining the LST, we returned to shore and set off on bicycles up the eastern fork of the V of the island to the site of the old wartime airstrips. As in the case of Nukufetau, the two airstrips are still in good condition, though overgrown with salt bush and coconut palms in places. A detachment of the 16th Construction Battalion built the north-south 6,000-foot bomber strip and east-west 3,000-foot fighter strip using a 4-12 inch thickness of live coral sprinkled with sea water.

Just beyond the northern end of the bomber strip, the guide led us to the only basically-intact aircraft wreck on Nanomea, a Douglas SBD-5 Dauntless dive bomber, missing its wings, engine, and cockpit instruments.

Two views of the remains of the SBD-5 Dauntless that crash-landed on Nanomea's fighter airstrip on November 17, 1943. The holes in the tail and rear fuselage have been caused by native ravages over the years rather than Japanese guns (Bartsch).

Fortunately however, the plane still retained its cockpit identification plate, indicating its model, serial number, and delivery date. By tracing the serial number with the airplane cards of the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, it was learned that this plane was from Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 331 (based on Nukufetau from November 1943 to February 1944), and that it was lost on November 27, 1943.

Almost two years later I finally succeeded in learning of the particular circumstances of the demise of this aircraft when Colonel Thomas S. Ivey, USMC (Ret.), the Executive Officer of the 7th Marine Defense Battalion on Nanomea during 1943-44, contacted me. Colonel Ivey witnessed the crash of this plane, which was coming in with another SBD-5 of the squadron to land at dusk after a flight from its base at Nukufetau in order to be ready for a routine anti-submarine and surveillance patrol from Nanomea at dawn. Making his approach to land, the pilot of the ill-fated aircraft discovered that only one of his wheels would come down and lock. After a radio conference with the other pilot, it was decided to try a hair-raising maneuver. They would come in from the east at an altitude of a few feet, as slow and as close together as possible, with the lame duck at the rear with his wheels up. When they were over the cleared (but unfinished) cross-runway, the lead plane would go to full power (to give a back blast) while the lame duck would cut his engine and, hopefully, skid to a finish in the soft sand. This they did, with aplomb and precision. The pilot stepped out without a scratch, though the SBD was in such bad shape it could not be flown again.

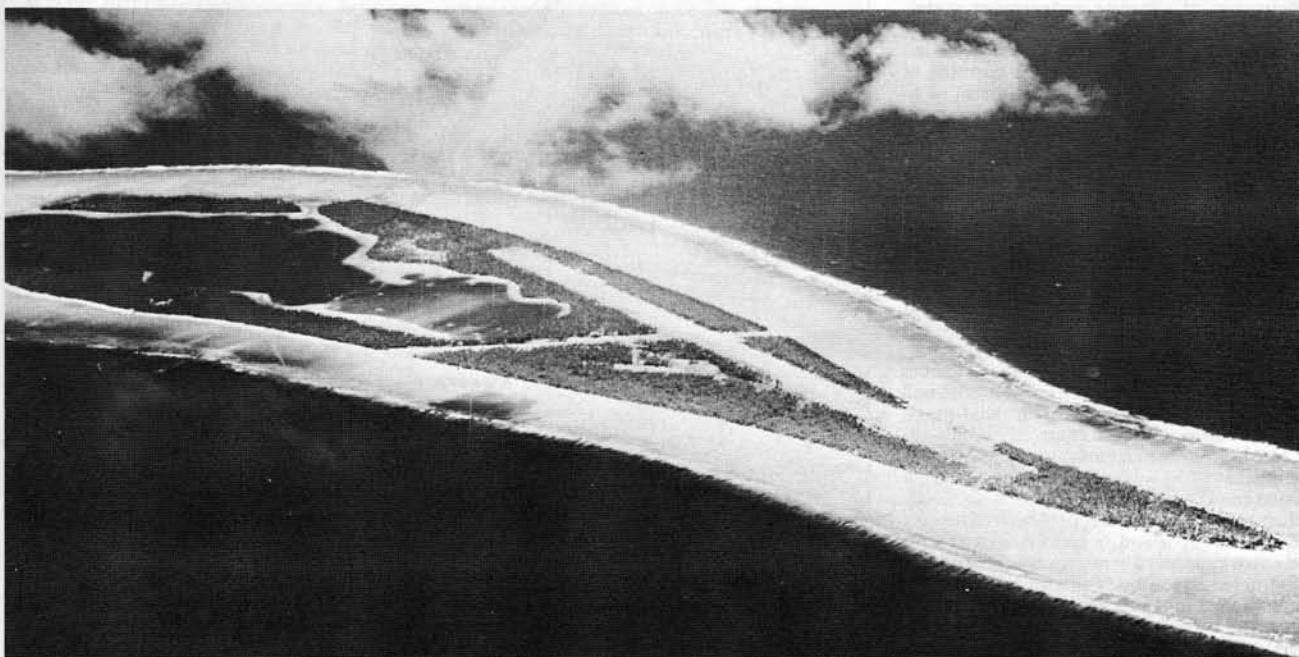
At the juncture of the V of Nanomea Island we found the only other aircraft wreck on the island. This is the middle fuselage section of a B-24 lying on its side in an overgrown area about thirty feet off the path that leads to the airstrips. This must be all that remains of either 'Sexy Sue III' of the 98th Bombardment Squadron, which was rammed on the runway on November 14, 1943, when another B-24 taxied into her in landing on return from a raid on Tarawa, or of 'Raunchy' of the 27th Bombardment Squadron, which crashed and burned on the night of November 19, 1943 on return from a strike against Butaritari when it hit an 80-foot palm tree flanking the airstrip while attempting to land. Two months earlier, another B-24 'Wake Island Sleeper', of the 26th Bombardment Squadron, attacked by Zeros on a raid over Tarawa, was damaged in its gas line and with the inside of the plane literally awash in aviation gas (according to Colonel Ivey, who witnessed this one too), it made a crash landing on the western reef of Nanomea fifty yards offshore. Though the crew got out safely and the plane was still intact, when Seabees attempted to drag it ashore, it burst into flames. What traces of it exist today are in deep water over the edge of the reef, where it was subsequently bulldozed. These three were the only B-24 losses on Nanomea during the war.

After our morning search on Nanomea, we hurried back to our launch for the return trip through the reef passage as the tide was running out. Back on the 'Nareau', Captain Pasefika set course for Tarawa, 460 miles to the northwest. For the next two-and a half days, we plied the vast open sea of the Central Pacific, passing to the west of the islands of the southern Gilberts before turning east to skirt Maiana and then approach Tarawa. The Gilberts took the first step towards internal self-government on November 1, 1976 and the second on January 1, 1977. Independence will be final early in 1978.

Right: **The B-24 Liberator's middle fuselage section lying in the bush off the path leading to the airstrip at Nanomea. Three B-24s were lost on the island (Bartsch).**

Below: Photo taken early in 1944 of the fighter and bomber strips on Nanomea Island (National Archives, Navy).

Above: A 5,000ft aerial view showing the same area of Nanome with the runways barely visible (Directorate of Overseas Surveys

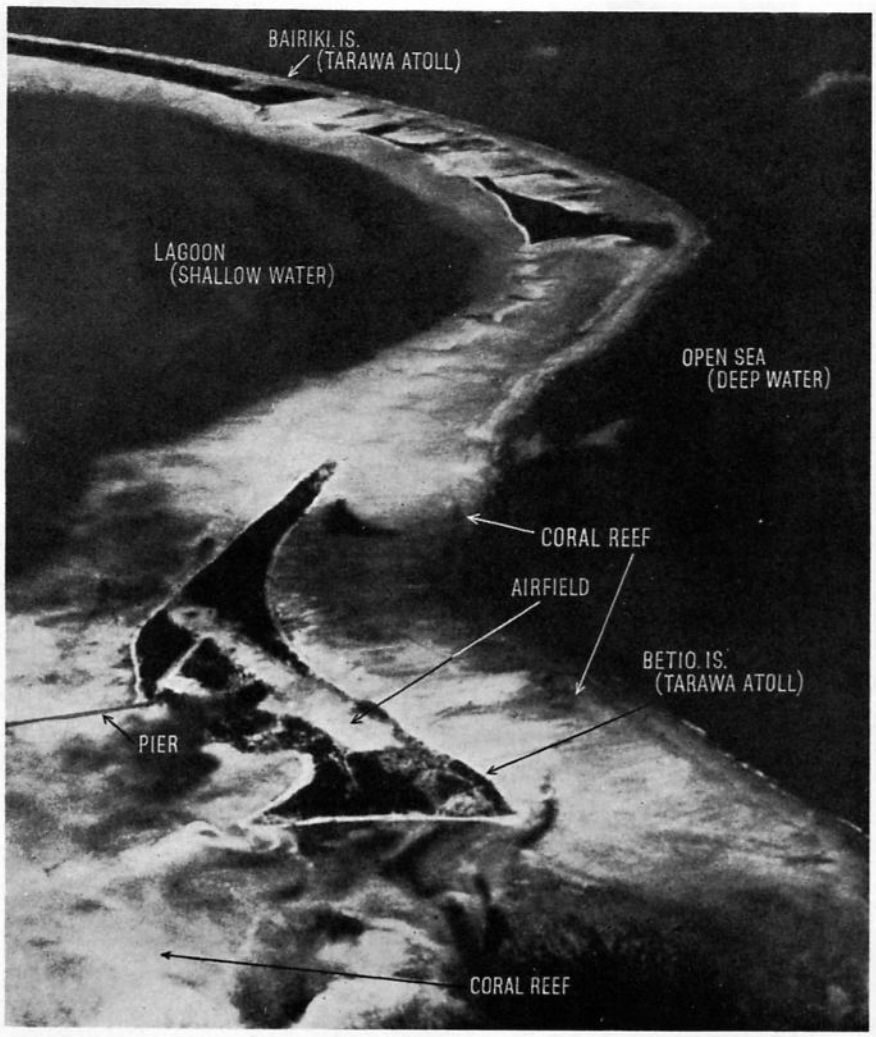


TARAWA ATOLL

The Gilbert Islands were discovered by the Portuguese navigator Quiros in 1606 and were named after the master of an East Indiaman, Thomas Gilbert in 1788. Robert Louis Stevenson spent several months in the Gilberts in 1889 and called attention to them by writing 'In the South Seas', whereupon the British Government took them under its protection in 1892.

Tarawa (pronounced with all short 'a's), one of the sixteen or so atolls which form the group, is a triangular atoll lying just eighty miles north of the equator. Two of the sides of the triangle, one twelve the other eighteen miles long, are formed from strings of low-lying islands, none higher than ten feet above sea level. The third side is open to the sea although a barrier reef leaves only one navigable entrance channel into the lagoon.

In the south-west corner of Tarawa lies the island of Betio (pronounced 'Bay-shio'). It was here at 3.00 p.m. on December 10, 1941 that the Japanese landed a token force from a destroyer. Luckily the Administration Officer was away visiting the southern Gilberts at the time and a timely radio message, warning that the Japanese had arrived, turned his ship about and he reached Fiji safely.



The Defences

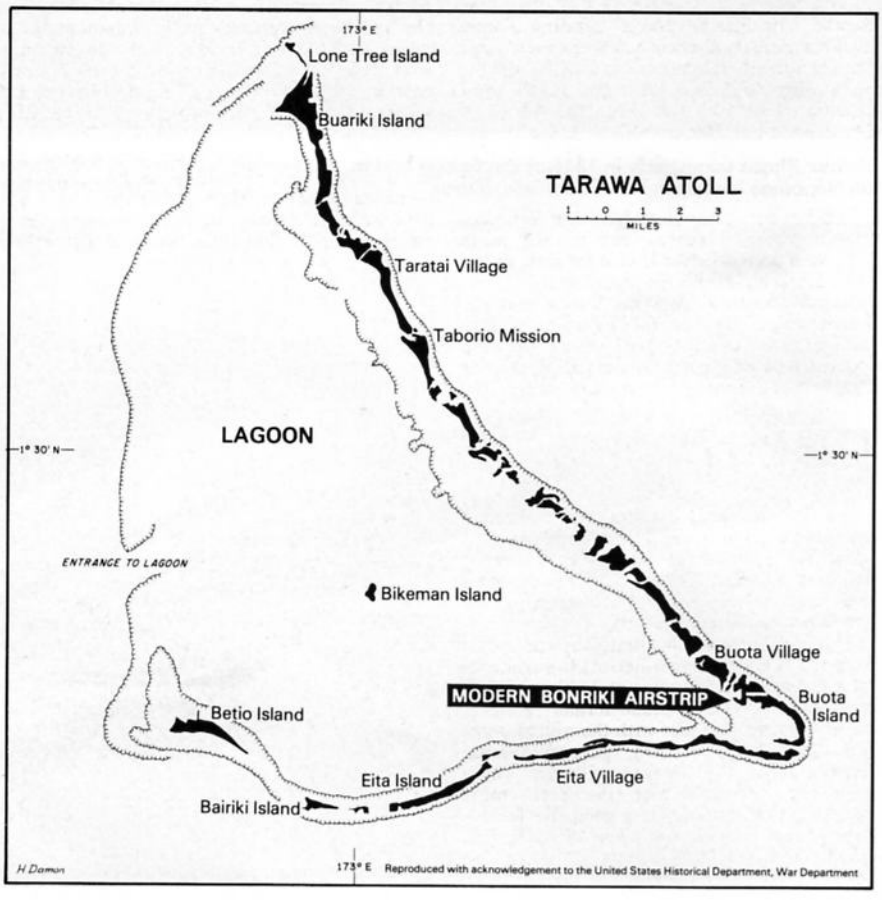
Nothing much happened on the island until the Makin raid, six months later, woke up the Japanese High Command as to the vulnerability of their island conquests. In September 1942, troops were sent to occupy the Gilberts in force; the cornerstone of the Japanese defence was to be the island of Betio. Here, Rear-Admiral Tomanari Saichiro converted the small, 312-acre island paradise into a formidable fortress.

The island already had a natural first line of defence against approaching naval vessels with the fringing reef which extended seaward between 800 and 1,200 yards. The second defensive line was a barracade, three to five feet high, constructed from coconut logs wired and stapled together which ran along the edge of the beach around half the island. Behind this, machine gun emplacements covered by coconut logs, coral and sand (with some constructed of concrete and armour plate), were connected by revetted trenches. Twenty-five field guns of 37mm and 75mm were sited in pillboxes protected by a thick covering of concrete, armour, logs and sand, immune to all but a direct hit from a large shell.

At the corners of the island, and at various other points along the shore, fourteen coastal defence guns from 80mm to 8-inch calibre were sited to cover the beaches, all being provided with bombproof shelters for the crews and ammunition. The Japanese expected an attack to come from the seaward side and mined, concrete tetrahedron beach obstacles were set up to funnel invasion craft into lanes covered by the artillery.

The centre of the island was largely occupied by the 4,000ft airstrip begun in October 1942, constructed of compacted reef mud and coral. The first landing by a land-based bomber was made on January 28, 1943 and, by May 31, the major runway was 80 per cent completed with work half completed on a second runway.

Just to the north of the airstrip, in a central position on the island, a massive sixty foot by forty foot reinforced-concrete blockhouse was constructed, standing twenty-five feet high to serve as the Japanese command post. Steps led to the roof on which two 13mm machine guns were sited. It was here that Rear-Admiral Keiji Shibasaki took over command



The Tarawa commander, Rear-Admiral Keiji Shibasaki (War History Office, Japan).

of the island from Admiral Saichiro in September 1943. He had at his command, 1,122 well-trained sailors from the 3rd Special Base Force with another 1,497 from the Sasebo 7th Special Naval Landing Force. Besides these combat troops, there was a large contingent of labourers, mostly Koreans, amounting to 1,247 from the 111th Construction Unit and 970 from the 4th Fleet Construction Department Detachment. Mobile armour was provided by seven Type 95 light tanks each having a 37mm cannon and two 7.7mm machine guns.

It is not surprising therefore, that Betio, an island only 3,800 yards long by 300 yards wide, has been described, acre for acre, as the most formidable fortress in the world. Rear-Admiral Shibasaki told his troops that the Americans could not take Tarawa with a million men in a hundred years. He gave orders 'to defend to the last man all vital areas and destroy the enemy at the water's edge.'

The Reef

Admiral Spruance had not underestimated the task involved in capturing the island and, while the problem of bases for the heavy bombers required to knock-out the defences had been solved, that of transporting the troops across the reef had not.

The reef surrounding Betio shelved gently from the beach to deep water. As the available information on tides was unreliable, a group of British and New Zealand former residents of the Gilberts, familiar with the waters, were consulted. They, in turn, gave conflicting reports about the amount of water which could be expected over the reef, most declaring there should be a good five feet — more than enough to allow the Higgins landing craft to manoeuvre right up to the beach.

The one dissenting voice was that of the former Headmaster of the Secondary School on Bairiki island, (the main one of the Tarawa Atoll), a British officer Major Frank Holland. He had been captured by the Japanese and taken to Betio but had managed to escape with three others on February 28, 1942. He had a clear recollection of the irregular 'dodging' tides that sometimes occurred during the period of the flood tide. When he discovered that the Americans were planning to invade on November 20 — on the neap tide — he was appalled. He explained that he had never seen more than three feet of water over the reef during that time. Admiral Turner's own staff also concluded they would be lucky to find the reef covered by more than one or two feet of water.

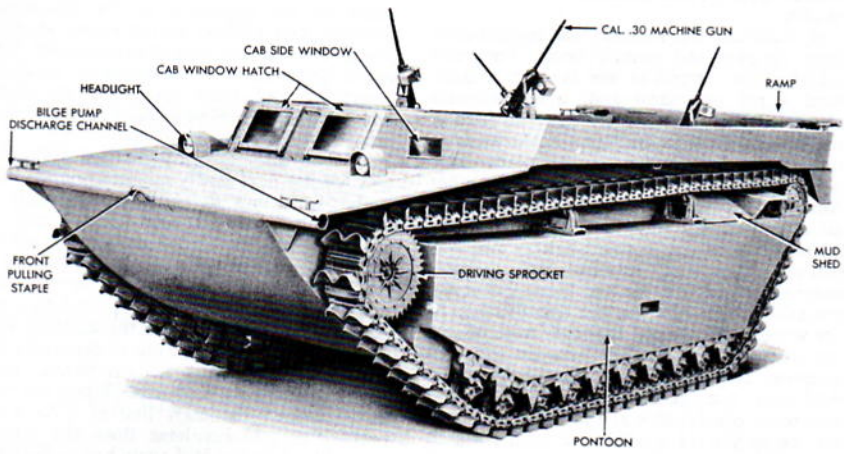
After his visit to Funafuti, Admiral Spruance realised that the tracked amphibian tractor (the 'Buffalo' to the British or 'amtrac' to the Americans) was the answer. This was a development from the vehicle manufactured by the American Food Machinery Corporation for rescue work in the Florida Everglades. The first model designated LVT-1, was 25 feet long, 10 feet 8 inches wide and weighed ten tons and could carry twenty men and a crew of six at four knots in the water or 15 mph on land.

General Julian C. Smith, commanding the 2nd Marine Division, whose troops were to carry out the assault on Tarawa, knew he needed the amtracs to give his men the chance of getting ashore alive. The Marines had already been told they only stood a fifty-fifty chance of getting to the shore using boats; what would their chances be of staying alive, if, instead, they had to wade the 800 yards to the beach? Only seventy-five serviceable amtracs could be supplied for embarkation in Wellington, New Zealand (where the Division had assembled), but General Smith was promised a hundred more. In the event only fifty extra amtracs, albeit LVT-2s, a more modern, armoured version, were shipped direct to Samoa just in time to catch the 2nd Marine Amphibian Tractor Battalion before it set sail for Tarawa.

The Plan

The landing was scheduled for November 20, 1943. The latest intelligence reports gave an estimated Japanese strength on Betio of between 2,500 and 3,100 men. These totals were uniquely computed from the number of toilets on the island! Lieutenant-Colonel David Shoup, commander of the 2nd Marine Regimental Combat Team (RCT), had discovered that the Japanese built their latrines over the water in multi-holed wooden constructions clearly visible on aerial photographs. By methodically adding up the number of latrines and working out a probable ratio of backsides to holes, the Colonel came up with a remarkably accurate guess of the number in the Japanese garrison!

Against these defenders, the Americans planned to land 18,600 Marines, not on the seaward shore but on the northern, lagoon beaches. Here, the landing area had been divided from the west to east, into three beaches; Red Beach 1, 2 and 3.



A Landing Vehicle Tracked Mk IV; 'amtrac' to the Americans, or Buffalo to the British.

Red Beach 1, allocated to the 2nd Battalion of the 8th Marine RCT consisted of a deep cove easily defended by enfilade fire from both sides. Red Beach 2, protected for its entire length by the log barricade, would be assaulted by the 2nd Battalion of the 2nd Marine RCT. At the western end of this beach, the Central Pier, a wooden structure over a quarter of a mile long, marked the beginning of Red Beach 3. This beach, to be attacked by the 3rd Battalion of the 2nd Marine RCT, stretched over eight hundred yards to the west with a small jetty, the Burns-Philp wharf, projecting half-way along its length. It was behind this beach that the Japanese Command Post bunker was located. The first three assault waves would consist of Marines in amtracs, the fourth wave of tanks in LCMs and the fifth of LCVPs each carrying thirty-six men.

Although bombing by land-based aircraft had been continuing for some weeks prior to D-Day, it was planned that Navy planes would strike the island for thirty minutes prior to H-Hour. Additionally, it was hoped that two and a half hours preliminary bombardment by three battleships, four cruisers and a number of destroyers (delivering a combined weight of 3,000 tons of shells) would knock out the shore defences. Indeed, Admiral Kingman, commander of the fire-support group, claimed that he would not neutralise Betio and he would not destroy it . . . but obliterate it!

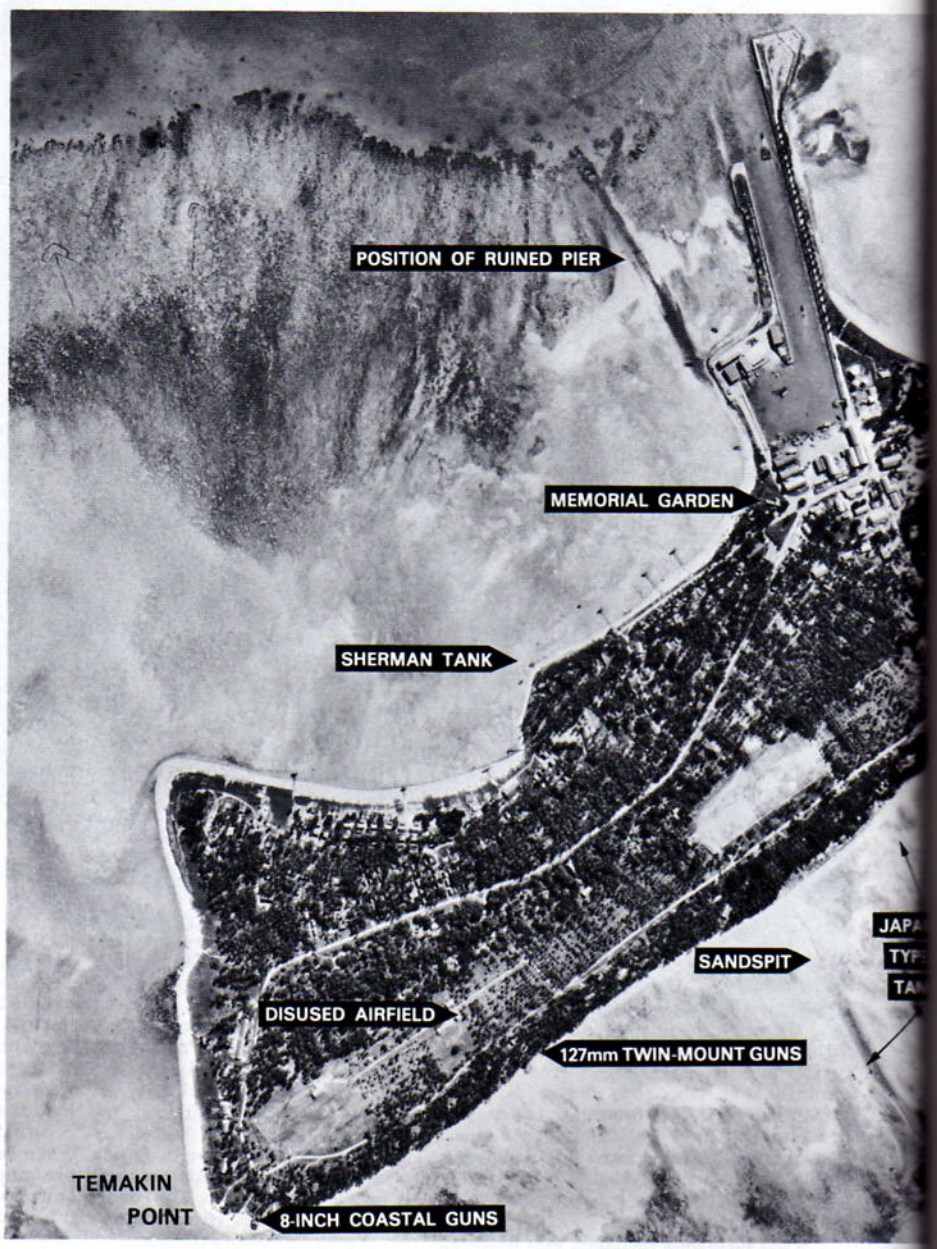
The Attack

The opening moves, in what was hoped would be a surprise attack, began badly. The Southern Attack Group assigned to Tarawa was commanded by Rear-Admiral Hill in the battleship *Maryland.* The approach to the islands was very nearly disrupted by poor maps as it was discovered that Betio was oriented wrong on the Admiralty chart being used to navigate the fleet. Fortunately, the submarine *Nautilus* had noticed the error and reported the fact to the *Maryland* where a new approach chart was improvised by rotating the compass rose 11 degrees. At 10.00 p.m. on November 19, as the invasion fleet closed on Tarawa, the *Nautilus* was rewarded for her endeavours with a 5-inch salvo from the leading American ship (one shell hitting the base of the conning tower) which had spotted an unidentified trace on its radar!

Then, just as the Marines were clambering into their boats, a searchlight was switched on at the north-west corner of the island, lighting up one of the transports. Although it was doused quickly, the defences were obviously awake.

By 4.00 a.m. the Marines had embarked in their amtracs and assault boats. Forty-one minutes later, a gun on the far side of Betio fired a red star shell and, a few minutes afterwards, one of the shore batteries fired at the flash from the catapult on the *Maryland* as the warship launched its spotter plane. This was answered by a salvo from one of the other American battleships scoring a direct hit on an ammunition dump in the centre of the island. Just as the counter-battery fire was getting under way, Admiral Hill abruptly ordered a cease fire. He had learned that the troopships had set down the assault boats in the wrong position and that they were now in the direct line of fire — between the fire-support ships and the assault beaches. Although not realised as such by the American commander at this stage, this was the beginning of a chain of events which disrupted the whole meticulously-planned timetable.

While the transports moved to their correct position, Rear-Admiral Shibasaki obviously made good use of the lull in the bombardment to concentrate his forces on the north shore.

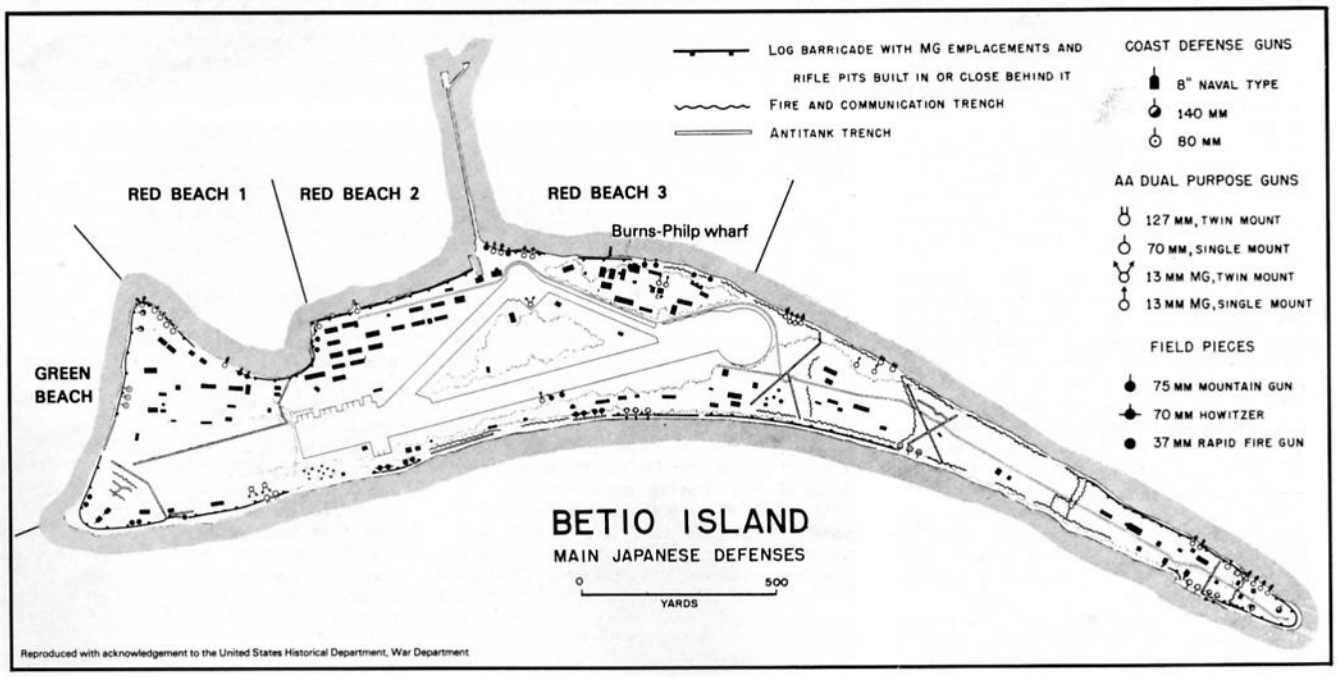


For twenty-five vital minutes, the seaborne artillery remained silent until Admiral Hill decided he could delay no longer. No sooner had he given the order to open fire than word came of the approach of the Dauntless, Avenger and Hellcat carrier-borne aircraft, twenty five minutes later than scheduled. This again necessitated a cease-fire as strict instructions had been given for the naval bombardment to cease while the aircraft were attacking.

At 6.05 a.m. the ships opened fire again and for the next eighty minutes pounded the island from end to end, stopping only at intervals as aircraft strafed the defences. At 6.45 a.m., the first three assault waves left the boat rendezvous having one hour in which to reach the start line and H-Hour was announced as 8.30 a.m. However at 7.48 a.m., the spotter plane reported the amtracs were still half-a-mile from the line of departure and Admiral Hill, having no alternative, postponed H-Hour to 8.45 a.m. When the first wave reached the start line at 8.25 a.m., twenty-five minutes later than the revised timetable, Admiral Hill again had to put back H-Hour by fifteen minutes. By 8.55 a.m., the island and parts of the lagoon were hidden under a heavy pall of smoke and, fearing the Marines may be hit as they landed, Admiral Hill ordered the bombardment to cease.

Again the speed of the amtracs had been overestimated and the leading elements, those approaching Red Beach 1, were still eighteen minutes from touchdown. This respite from the bombardment gave the defenders, in their bomb-proof bunkers, twenty minutes grace to recover from the shelling and prepare themselves for the landing. Thus, through a series of mishaps, the Japanese were given the chance to concentrate their forces at the precise point of the landings — a fatal advantage in a landing from the sea. To the Marines closing the beaches, the bombardment looked impressive and to Admiral Kingman 'it seemed almost impossible for any human being to be alive on Betio'. It was an illusion quickly dispelled.

On Red Beach 1, the reef was particularly extensive and the Japanese held their fire until the amtracs had approached to within a hundred yards of the beach. Then, with the 3rd Battalion Marines in a cross-fire between the arms of the cove, the defenders opened up with every weapon available. Heavy calibre coast-defence guns, light and heavy machine guns, mortars and rifles decimated the attackers. Amtrac drivers were killed and their gunners, standing exposed firing the .50 calibre Brownings from the prow of the tractor, were cut down as were the Marines as they tried to evacuate the burning, exploding



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Above and right: **Two views of members of the I Marine Amphibious Corps Tank Battalion on their M4 Sherman on Red Beach 1, on November 20, 1943 (National Archives, Navy).** *Bottom:* **Almost exactly 31 years later, two Betio youngsters perch on what is probably the same half-buried tank (Bartsch).**

craft. This is how one Marine, who landed in the first wave on Red Beach 1 and who survived, described the landing:

'Bullets pinged off that tractor like hailstones off a tin roof. Two shells hit the water twenty yards off the port side and sent up regular geysers. I swept the beach, just to keep the bastards down as much as possible.

'We were 100 yards in now and the enemy fire was awful damn intense and gettin' worse. They were knockin' boats out left and right. A tractor'd get hit, stop and burst into flames with men jumping out like torches.

'The water here was only about three feet deep, just covering the coral reefs, which the tractor'd bounce onto and over. Bullets ricocheted off the coral and up under the tractor. It must've been one of these bullets that got the driver. The boat lurched, and I looked in the cab and saw him slumped over, dead. The lieutenant jumped in and pulled the driver out, and drove, himself, till he got hit.

'That happened about thirty yards off shore. A shell struck the boat. The concussion felt like a big fist had smacked me right in the face. Shrapnel was pinging all around. Nicked hell out of my face and hands. One piece, about an inch long, tore into my back.

'Guys were sprawled all over the place, I looked across at my buddy, who was only five feet from me. He was on his back and his face was all bloody and he was holding his hand over his face and mumbling something.

'Our boat was stopped, and they were laying lead to us from a pill-box like holy hell. Everybody seemed stunned, so I yelled, "Let's get the hell outa here!" I grabbed my carbine and an ammunition box and stepped over a couple of fellas laying there and put my hand on the side so's to roll over into the water. I didn't want to put my head up. The bullets

were pouring at us like a sheet of rain . . . Only about a dozen out of the twenty-five went over the side with me, and only about four of us ever got evacuated.'

During the first two hours of battle, the 3rd Battalion lost more than a third of its men.

The next Marines to reach the beach were those of the 2nd Battalion (8 RCT) on Red Beach 3 at 9.17 a.m. They found two-thirds of the beach to the east of the pier so cluttered with coral that the seventeen amtracs destined for Red 3 all ended up close to the pier, opposite the apex of the airfield triangle. From here, two amtracs from Company E found a break in the defences and advanced a hundred yards to the airfield followed by the rest of the company on foot. Company F, on the left flank captured the small Burns-Philp jetty.

The worst casualties occurred on the central beach, Red 2 where the 2nd Battalion (2 RCT) came ashore at 9.22 a.m. The coconut-log barricade, which had survived the bombardment, ran the entire length of the beach. Perhaps, because they were the last Marines to reach the shore, the Japanese machine-gunners and riflemen in the gun emplacements behind the seawall were the most prepared. Company F was to land on the right and Company E on the left with Company G in support. As the three waves approached the beach they were met with a heavy, concentrated fire from all along the beach. As soon as the amtracs climbed onto the reef they were hit with all types of gunfire and the scene was one of utter confusion. Some men from Company F managed to reach the log barrier but all they could do was crouch against it for shelter. Some Marines, desperate to land anywhere, came ashore on Red 1.

Now the biggest disaster of all presented itself. Although those amtracs not hit had managed to negotiate the reef the LCVPs carrying the reserves, vitally needed to back up the pinned-down Marines ashore, grounded several hundred yards from the beach. To avoid being hit as sitting targets, the Marines had no alternative but to get out and wade ashore. The casualties to the men in the metal amtracs had been bad enough; to the Marines, protected by nothing more than their green shirts, it was an invitation to suicide. Men were mown down in their hundreds before they reached the scant protection of the log barricade and foxholes dug in the sand. There was no opportunity for the men to organise when they reached the beach and communications were out because the portable radios had been rendered inoperative by the salt water.

Lieutenant-Commander Robert MacPherson in the *Maryland's* observation plane had the only clear view of the disaster and was in constant radio contact with headquarters. He reported that there was so little water on the reef that in some places, the coral was actually drying in the sun.

Braving anti-aircraft fire, from his superior position MacPherson had a ringside seat for the action that was to earn Lieutenant William D. Hawkins the Medal of Honor. He saw Lieutenant Hawkins and his Scout-Snipers leading the first wave in two landing craft, touch down at the end of the Central Pier. Equipped with flame throwers, the platoon's task was to clear the pier of Japanese machine guns which would otherwise have been able to fire on the Marines, landing on Red 2 and 3, from the rear. Fighting with flame and grenades, the wooden pier was cleared of defences whereupon the Scout-Snipers returned to their boats to move ashore. However, the Japanese soon filtered back and Captain Aubrey K. Edmonds of E Company of the 2nd Battalion (8 RCT) in the first assault wave, had to repeat the performance.

Another Japanese offshore defence position was provided by the wreck of the Japanese freighter *Saida Maru* which had foundered on the reef earlier that month. Several snipers with a machine gun crew had slipped into the hulk, probably during the lull in the bombardment, and they took a heavy toll of the Marines landing on Red 1.

Above and below: **A 'then' and 'now' view of the upper eight-inch Vickers gun at Temakin Point, Betio. The gun and its turret show little change after 31 years, though the barrel appears to be at a lower elevation today (Bartsch).**

Colonel Shoup (also awarded the Medal of Honor) with his command party, made several attempts to reach the shore and only finally succeded by transferring to an amtrac. He finally reached Red Beach 2 about 10.30 a.m. While still afloat, Colonel Shoup could see the landing was going badly, more so, it seemed to him, on Red 1 and 2 and he ordered the 1st Battalion (2 RCT) to prepare to land on Red 2.

The 1st Battalion commander, Major Wood B. Kyle, could see it would be useless to try to land in anything but an amtrac, so he held the reserve at the reef until enough returning amtracs could be mustered. By 11.00 a.m. he had gathered enough to transport two companies A and B, but C Company had to wait on the reef for transport until 1.00 p.m. Facing the same intense curtain of fire only 110 men and one officer reached the beach.

Colonel Shoup's message, calling for reserves, had been intercepted on the *Maryland* and General Smith ordered in the 3rd Battalion of 8 RCT at midday, but it was late afternoon before those Marines that reached the shore could play an effective part. As night fell, the Marines had still failed to link up the beaches. The three assault battalions and two reserve battalions now committed had spent the day on, or only yards from, the beaches and, because of the breakdown of American communications, had received little or no resupply or support. The Japanese also had no communications during the day as the signal lines, which had been run on the surface, had been cut in the initial bombardment. Admiral Shibasaki had also been killed moving to a nearby bunker.

Only two Sherman tanks had got ashore on Red Beach 1 and of the three that landed on Red 2, two were knocked out during the day. Four Shermans landed on Red Beach 3 shortly after the first assault waves but three were put out of action in the first two hours. However, the Regimental Weapons Company had managed to land some self-propelled guns and half-tracks which were to prove invaluable in the subjugation of Japanese strongpoints.

Left: **The battered command bunker of Rear-Admiral Keiji Shibasaki, with an immobilised Japanese Type 95 tank in front of it, photographed on November 23, 1943 (Marine Corps).**

Right: **The bunker in November 1974. The tank is believed to be the same one lying on the lagoon beach (depicted on our front cover), where it was pushed from its original location (Bartsch).**

The Third Day

During the night, Colonel Edson issued orders for a co-ordinated attack the next morning, November 22, to be supported by the Bairiki artillery, air attacks and naval gunfire. At 8.00 a.m., the 1st Battalion (8 RCT) moved off down the hundred-yard strip of heavily fortified ground between the air field and south shore and, by 11.00 a.m., had joined up with the 1st Battalion (2 RCT) Marines. While the Americans suffered only light casualties, over 250 Japanese had been killed.

The advance successfully continued up to the eastern end of the airfield but other attacks against strongpoints elsewhere on the island were not so successful. The Japanese were still selling their lives dearly and by nightfall, although the Americans now held all the western end of Betio, it was estimated another five days fighting would be necessary to eliminate all the defenders.

During the day, General Smith had arrived to take charge personally and began to plan the operations for the following day. Up till now, the Japanese had conducted a successful defence from the safety of their pillboxes, taking a heavy toll of the attacking Marines. Now that the estimated 1,100 Japanese survivors were being pressed into the narrow, eastern end of the island with their escape route cut off, their tactics changed.

The Japanese radio had already broadcast a last message: 'Our weapons have been destroyed and from now on everyone is attempting a final charge . . . May Japan exist for ten-thousand years.' As night fell, the Japanese began their counter-attack. The first was directed at the 1st Battalion (6 RCT) at 7.30 p.m. and was only repulsed by fierce hand-to-hand fighting with bayonets and hand-grenades. Another attack was broken up by artillery firing at point-blank range.

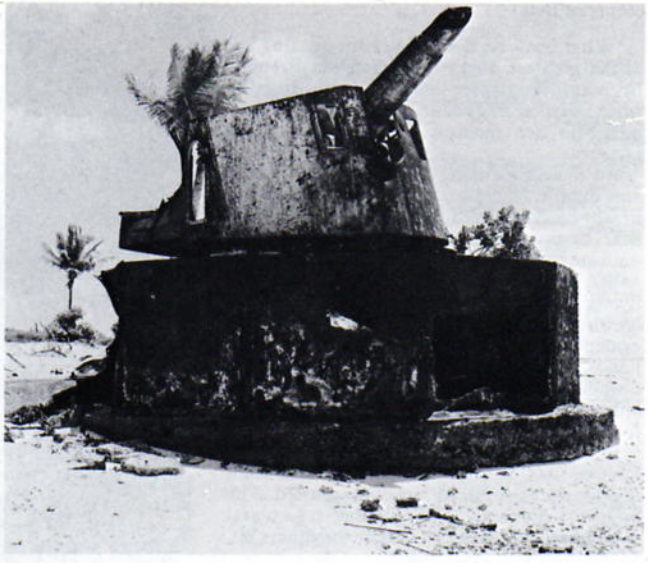
The Last Day

Then, at 3.00 a.m., on the fourth day, November 23, a final attack was launched by 300 Japanese troops which was repulsed within an hour. As day broke over 200 Japanese were found within an area fifty yards deep in front of the Marine positions with another hundred or more behind them, killed by artillery fire.

The Japanese had made a mistake in fighting in the open where they were just as vulnerable as the Marines. Their strength had been sapped and, at 8.00 a.m., General Smith took advantage of the situation and ordered the 3rd Battalion (6 RCT) to attack down the tail of Betio, supported by two Shermans and seven light tanks. Only at one point, about 350 yards beyond the eastern end of the airfield, did the Japanese offer any concerted resistance but this was bypassed to be mopped up by following troops.

On the airfield itself, Seabees had been at work with bulldozers since D+2 levelling the strip, the capture of which had been the whole purpose of the landings. Their labours under fire enabled the first Navy carrier plane to land at midday on the 23rd, while the fighting was still going on. Now and then, the Seabees were called to help the advance by bulldozing sand to bury Japanese positions.

Virtually no prisoners were taken, the Japanese preferring to expend their last bullet on themselves or commit hara-kari than suffer the ignomy of being captured alive. At 1.10 p.m., the battalion had reached the eastern tip of the island, having killed five hundred Japanese during the advance. The final pocket of Japanese resistance between Red Beach 1 and 2 was eliminated by a combined attack from the 1st Battalion (8 RCT) and 3rd Battalion (2 RCT) and, at 1.30 p.m., General Smith announced the end of organised resistance on Betio.



Left and right: **Views of one of the two eight-inch Vickers coastal defence guns at Takarongo Point, Betio, in 1943 and 1974. This gun lost the tip of its barrel in the heavy, pre-invasion bombardment of Betio. Except for the erosion of its sand base, its appearance is little changed since the Battle of Tarawa (Marine Corps/ Bartsch).**

The Aftermath

The final storming of a large bombproof shelter behind Red Beach 1 had been attended by correspondents, photographers and newsmen. They had landed on Betio with the Marines to record this, the first invasion of a Pacific atoll, and many lost their lives in doing so. However it is through their courage and sacrifice that many incredible, action photographs were taken during the fighting and to one in particular, Robert Sherrod, a Time-Life correspondent, that we have been given a graphic description of the carnage on Betio. He describes in his book, simply titled 'Tarawa', how the fighting had kept him pinned down to an area of perhaps four hundred yards on Red Beach 3. Therefore, when the battle was over, to understand what had happened in each sector, he spent a day and a half making three tours around the island. His first took him to the north-west corner of Betio:

'What I saw on Betio was, I am certain, one of the greatest works of devastation wrought by man. Words are inadequate to describe what I saw on this island of less than a square mile. So are pictures — you can't smell pictures.

'In the water there are rows of land mines and double fences of barbed wire. There are fifteen dead Japs in an around the first pillbox next to the tank trap, all dressed in green uniforms, wrap-around leggings and hob-nailed shoes except one who wore a Navy flyer's blue uniform. Two of the fifteen have blown their guts out with hand grenades, as evidenced by their missing stomachs and right hands. Most of the bodies are already turning a sickly green, though they have been corpses only two days—as against five for most of the five thousand putrefying bodies on Betio . . .

Five cemeteries have been started thus far—by 0800 of the fifth day—and less than one-fourth of our dead have been buried. The largest cemetery, next to the regimental command post, has 134 graves; the others 80, 53, 20, and 41 respectively.

'Going westward up the beach, we see the bodies of Marines who have not yet been reached by the burial parties. The first is a husky boy who must have been three inches over six feet tall. He was killed ten feet in front of the seawall pillbox which was his objective. He is still hunched forward, his rifle in his right hand . . .

'Fifty feet further up the beach, ten Marines were killed on the barbed wire on the coral flats. One of them was evidently shot as he placed his foot on the top rung of the wire—his trouser leg was caught on the barbs and the leg still hangs in the air. There are eighty more dead Marines scattered in a twenty-foot square of the beach just beyond. Six more . . . two more . . . four more. Here four got to the very mouth of the coconut-log pillbox, but none of them made it, because there are no dead Japs inside. But in the next pillbox there are two Japs sprawled over their machine gun, and in the next, five yards further along the seawall, there are three. All appear to have been killed by hand grenades.

'A Marine near a gun pit had evidently been hit squarely by a 77mm shell. There is a hole through his midsection, and he is badly burned—so badly that he could hardly be identified as a Marine but for the laced leggings under his trouser legs . . .

'About halfway up the west beach we turn inland and start back through the center of the island, past the body of a bloated Jap officer lying next to some dull-brown trucks. A bit further toward the center, the Marines have thrown a few shovelfuls of sand over the ghastly, mangled bodies of a dozen Japs. Dead Japs are strewn liberally along the road that leads through the center, eight here, two there, thirty over there where they were caught by a flamethrower. Two lie beside a Jap light tank, which is camouflaged in the navy fashion of World War I. On the other side of the tank lies a Marine, whose body's site is marked for burial parties by the age-old method; his bayoneted rifle jabbed upright

Inspection of the shattered Japanese defences on Betio. Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief of the US Pacific Fleet, looks down at the death and destruction. General Julian C. Smith leads the way (IWM).

into the ground . . . Scattered along the road are several one-man sniper pits: gasoline drums sunk into the ground, with a lid for cover.

'Between the road and the north beach, spaced some fifty yards apart there are three big coconut-log bomb shelters, about twenty by fifty feet inside. Outside they are covered on the top and on the sides by three to ten feet of sand. None was touched either by aerial or naval bombardment. The occupants, cowering in their corners, had been killed by TNT and flamethrowers . . . '

Robert Sherrod's second tour was when he accompanied General Holland M. Smith and General Julian Smith, partly retracing his earlier route around the west of the island.

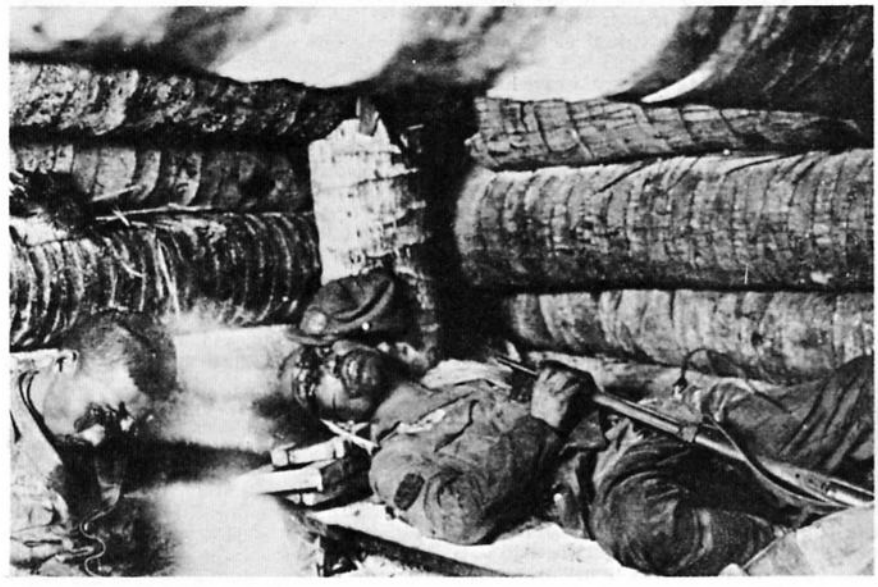
'Before the tour started there was, at Julian Smith's suggestion, a double flag-raising near headquarters; US and British flags went up on twin flagpoles. There had been a devil of a time finding a British flag. Finally, Major Frank Holland, produced a British flag about half the size of the Stars and Stripes. In the words of Henry Keys, the Australian correspondent representing the London *Daily Express*. "Major Holland looked in his bag. It contained one pair of drawers and the Union Jack."

'The first three dead men the generals see are Marines; one near a disabled Jap tank on the edge of the runway, two more in a shellhole not far away. Fifty yards before they reach the south shore, after crossing the runway, they find the hastily scooped graves of three more Marines . . .

'On the beach there is a twin-mount 5.5-inch seacoast gun, which obviously had been demounted from a ship for shore duty. Three dead Japs are inside the cup surrounding the gun, and there are two more in a cut-back which has been hit directly. In the area of this twin-mount naval gunfire has obviously been very effective. On a sand hill thirty yards behind the guns the Japs had mounted a fire director and range finder.

'A hundred yards or so west of the first guns there is another twin-mount 5.5-inch set of guns. This is a grisly sight. There are two Japs under the gun barrels who have committed suicide with hand grenades. Four more are in a ditch leading from a nearby dugout. Only one of these is a suicide, but another's heart bulges out of his chest, which apparently has been rent open by a shell, and a third is only a stick of char.

'At the southwest tip of the island they see two of the four eight-inch guns which the Japs



had on Betio. Both guns are pointed toward the direction from which our transports approached, but it is obvious that they were put out of action by some of the first salvos fired by our battleships. Hardly a round of eight-inch shells has been fired. It is easy to see what did the trick: a direct hit on the concrete powder chamber next to the guns. A gaping hole through the powder chamber indicates that a sixteen-inch shell perforated there. Inside the chamber there are about twenty-five charred Japs. Others are hanging on the jagged edge of the hole and for fifty yards beyond the hole Japs are spewed out over the sandy terrain. That must have been the terrific explosion we saw on the third battleship shot.

'Next to the exploded powder chamber is the biggest hole on the pockmarked island of Betio—some sixty feet in diameter and much deeper than the sub-surface water level of the island. Scattered about the rim of the great hole are about two hundred rounds of eight-inch ammunition, evidence that the ammunition dump as well as the powder house blew up . . .

'When we reach the northern shore—we notice an amazing phenomenon: the full tide is now washing against the seawall to a depth of three feet, and the Marines who were lying on the beach this morning are now floating against the seawall. In other words, the tide during those first two critical days was exceptionally low, perhaps due to a wind from the south, or the Marines would have had no beachhead at all!

'The Marines floating in the water are now pitiful figures. Many of them have had the hair washed off their heads by this time. Julian Smith orders an additional burial party formed to speed up the interment of the Americans . . .

'The generals are awestruck when they inspect the pillboxes the assault troops had to knock out. "By God," says Holland Smith, "those Marines just kept coming. Many of them were killed, but more came on. It looks beyond the realm of a human being that this place could have been taken. These Japanese were masters of defensive construction. I never saw anything like these defenses in the last war. The Germans never built anything like this in France."'

The next day, Sherrod's final tour took him to the eastern end of the island.

'The march up the tail of the island is strewn with carnage. Now, on the sixth day, the smell of the dead is unbelievable. The ruptured and twisted bodies which expose their rotting inner organs are inexpressibly repelling. The fire from a burning pile of rubble has reached six nearby Jap bodies, which sizzle and pop as the flame consumes flesh and gases. Fifteen more are scattered around a food dump, and two others are blown to a hundred pieces—a hand here, a head there, a hobnailed foot farther away . . .

'Under the Burns Philp pier lie a dozen Japs who machine-gunned the Americans as they waded ashore (a destroyer finally smashed the pier). Under a privy platform which is also smashed lie fourteen more Japs. . . .

'Inland there is one of the biggest concrete blockhouses on the island—about sixty by forty, and twenty-five feet high. Four direct hits, probably from battleships, smashed through its walls, and a Marine souvenir-hunter says there are 300 charred Jap bodies inside. Steps lead to the roof of the blockhouse, where there are two 13mm machine guns. In one gun nest there are four dead Japs, in the other, two. Four others are scattered around the rooftop and two more are in a pen covered by sandbags. All apparently were killed by strafing planes, although some naval gun shrapnel nicked the extension of the walls which protect the roof-bound machine gunners. These nicks show that the entire thick concrete structure was laced with half-inch reinforcing steel. A Marine sits down on the roof, opens a can of C ration, and eats heartily.

'Outside there are two burned Jap tanks, carrying license plates number 102 and 113 and the Navy anchor insignia. A black automobile in a nearby wooden garage has hardly been touched. None of the glass windows has been broken and there are only a few strafing bullets through the top of the car. An indifferent Marine gets in the car, steps on the starter. The engine runs like a sewing machine. Near the garage there is what was once a motor pool—the concrete blockhouse was undoubtedly a headquarters. A dozen motorcycles with sidecars are burned to steel skeletons, but one little motorcycle truck is in fairly good condition . . .

'On the south shore, near the tail end, are the remains of two more eight-inch Vickers guns. One of the gun barrels is broken off about four feet from where it sticks out of the turret. The other gun is badly burned and strafing bullets had nicked the inside of the barrel so badly that it probably could not have been fired again. There are three searchlights within 300 yards, and numerous 13mm and 77mm anti-aircraft guns protect the big guns. Not far away there are twenty dead Japs in a shellhole. Perhaps they had worked at the mixer which had been pouring dozens of pyramidal concrete blocks for the defense of Betio against the expected invasion.'

Above: **Six months after the invasion of Betio, a simple cross still marks the grave of some unknown Marines. In 1944, the various points of interest were signposted for visitors (New York Times).**

Above: **Thirty years later, Australian photo-journalist Bruce Adams photographed this unidentified cross, helmet and water bottle near the airfield.**

In the late afternoon of November 10, the little 'Nareau' dropped anchor just inside Tarawa's lagoon entrance. I lowered myself once more into the ship's launch and slowly headed with the other Tarawa passengers for the landing on Betio island at the end of the long concrete pier. A joint Japanese-American memorial has been set up on the end of the mole with an inscription of the estimated numbers killed on the island.

My first impression of Betio was not that of a bloody battlefield of history, but of teeming humanity, at least compared with the islands I had visited in the Ellice group. The port area was crowded with Gilbertese, most on motorbikes, come to see the arrival of passengers from the 'Nareau'. I soon learned that overcrowding is the most serious problem on Betio, on whose one-half square mile live more than 6,000 persons.

Betio was the island I had come to explore for war remains, being the main site of the Battle of Tarawa, although I was to stay with a friend on the adjoining island of Bairiki, the center of Government administration for the Gilbert and Ellice Islands in 1974. There was no problem about transportation however; a ferry left Betio for Bairiki and vice-versa every other hour for a short half-hour crossing.

Although the five days at my disposal had seemed quite adequate to cover the small island thoroughly, in practice the mind-boggling profusion of war relics I found there made it barely possible to accomplish the task in time. Slogging up and down the beaches in shorts and sandshoes, I was impervious to the searing heat, blinding sun and glare as I came upon one war remain after another of the epic battle that had taken place almost exactly thirty-one years earlier. My enthusiasm amused the local people, so indifferent to the monuments of the battle around them that has forever put their island on the world map but which are of no functional value to them in their every-day lives.

As part of the general rehabilitation of Betio, the airstrip, later renamed Hawkins Field by the Americans in memory of the Medal of Honor Lieutenant, was replanted with coconut trees in 1948-9 to provide a subsistance economy for the landowners who returned to live on the island.

Since the largest number of remains of the Battle of Tarawa lie off the lagoon and ocean beaches, I had to time my daily searches on Betio to coincide with low tide conditions, for at high tide most relics were not visible.

Among the most deteriorated remains lying out in the lagoon water off of the western (Green Beach) and northern (Red Beach) shores of Betio today are about 20 rusted remnants of amtracs, only recognisable by their caterpillar tracks. The two I found off Temakin Point on Green Beach were among the ninety that were lost of those used by Marines to get over the reef to the beaches of Betio.

Unfortunately, I was six months too late to experience the unique find of another amtrac on Betio. For 31 years the gun mount from some type of vehicle had been sticking up in the back yard of a Gilbertese about 200 yards inland from Red Beach. During work on the construction of Betio's new water pipeline in May 1974, it constituted an obstacle in the path of the pipeline, and was unearthed. To the amazement of all, the excavation revealed an amtrac in remarkably good condition, along with the skeletons of two US Marines and, in mint condition, preserved in the diesel oil that had flooded the amtrac from its punctured oil tank, four cases of 50 and 30 calibre ammunition, a box of spare parts, even the victims' toothbrushes, shaving cream, razors, and aspirin! From his 'dogtag', one of the two Marines was identified as Private Henry C. Verhaalen, previously recorded as 'Missing in Action'. The other body carried no identification. Curiously enough, the amtrac today is back in its original position; it was decided to rebury it and build the pipeline around it. The gun mount once again marks its location.

Above: **US Marines examine the wreckage of a Japanese aircraft destroyed on the main runway on Betio (IWM).** *Below:* **Seabees were soon at work levelling the airstrip — renamed Hawkins Field — in preparation for its use as a fighter and bomber base (IWM).**

Above: **The main runway today, photographed from the radio observation tower (Bartsch).**

Another interesting relic, on Red Beach 2, is a US Sherman medium tank, which lies half-submerged in the sand at low tide, most likely one of those lost to Japanese gunfire in the initial landings. Another Sherman tank was also in evidence for a number of years on Betio, until it met an ignominious fate: it was used as filler in the construction of the new pier on Betio.

The remains of Japanese tanks are in greater profusion. Six out of the seven Type 95 light tanks the Japanese used in the defense of Betio lie in shallow water just off the lagoon and ocean beaches in varying stages of deterioration. The example in best condition rests on its side at the eastern end of Red Beach 3, fully visible at low tide. Except for its missing track on one side, it is virtually intact, complete with its 37 and 7.7 mm gun turrets and guns. Today local children use it as a diving platform at high tide.

A few yards down and inland from this tank one can see the still-blackened, two-storey concrete bunker of Rear-Admiral Shibasaki, the commanding officer of Tarawa's defenses. Huge holes on the lagoon side of the bunker attest to the damage inflicted by point-blank shelling by a US destroyer. At noon on the first day of the battle, a direct hit had killed

Left: **The remains of Private Henry C. Verhaalen, unearthed in an amtrac in May 1974 (Ken Butler).** *Above:* **The gun mount of the amtrac after its re-burial by pipeline construction workers (Bartsch).**

the Admiral and most of his staff and his body was never found. My enthusiasm to explore the bunker was dampened by a reality of life today: the command bunker is used as a convenient communal toilet by the islanders. Human excrement everywhere makes any close inspection of the bunker a perilous business — the smell alone is sufficient to deter the most determined.

On the ocean side of Betio are still found the best-known relics of the Battle of Tarawa, the four eight-inch coastal defense guns that command Temakin and Takarongo Points at the western and eastern extremities of Betio, respectively. Except for the lower gun at Temakin, which has fallen from its foundation into the sea, these guns and their mounts have been little troubled by the elements over the past three decades. They were emplaced by the Japanese to defend the ocean approach, from which direction it was expected the Americans would invade and, in the event, proved relatively easy targets for Allied bombardment. One of the pair at Takarongo Point has lost the end of its barrel, the result of a direct hit while the others all show scars of this bombardment.

It is generally believed that these guns are British and were brought to Tarawa from Singapore following the fall of that bastion in February 1942. A close inspection of the guns confirmed that they are indeed of British origin. Though no markings are still visible on the Takarongo Point guns, the breech of the upper gun at Temakin is clearly stamped 'B.L. 8 In. V.S. & M. 1905. No. 1158A'. Simultaneous inquiries to the Imperial War Museum in London and the manufacturers, Vickers (then Vickers Sons and Maxim), put an end to the Singapore myth, however. The IWM reported that there were no eight-inch guns among those captured by the Japanese at Singapore, while Vickers indicated that in the early 1900s — a period of good relations with its future adversary — it built a number of warships and supplied other arms to the Imperial Japanese Navy. Vickers also sent me a photocopy of a contract, dated January 17, 1905, between Vickers Sons and Maxim and Captain Iwamoto of the Japanese Navy, calling for completion of 12 eight-inch 45 calibre, quick-firing guns (at £4,600 each) in 11 months and delivery from their works to Japan. It would appear that the Tarawa guns are thus a part of the 1905 contract.

All along the ocean side of Betio, many of the strong fortifications built by the Japanese are still in evidence today. In addition to the eight-inch guns, the defenders had placed concrete tetrahedron blocks in the shallows to divert landing craft into the Japanese lines of fire, and some of these are still in place about

Above: **Scarcely recognisable, the remains of a single-engined aircraft lie rusting on a sandspit off the ocean beach of Betio (Bartsch).** *Below:* **Further along the ocean beach, these steel and concrete tetrahedrons were photographed by Bruce Adams.**

Left: **Admiral Nimitz inspects one of the two, twin-mount 127 mm (approximately 5-inch) gun emplacements halfway down the ocean beach of Betio.** *Right:* **The effects of 31 years of the elements and erosion are evident in this photo of the same or sister gun emplacement near it. The twin guns have fallen from their mount and rest on a section of the concrete wall (Bartsch).**

half-way down the beach. At least two other coastal defense guns emplaced by the Japanese — these are 127mm — are still in their original position just below the cemetery, though they have fallen from their twin mount.

Half-way down the beach two sandspits extending out into the ocean reveal themselves at low tide with their cover of military debris dumped in them after the battle. Numerous aircraft engines with bent propellers, a top-less Japanese type 95 tank and another in better condition lying on its side, partly buried in the sand, and part of the fuselage and wings of an unidentifiable single-engine aircraft, severed from its engine and lying a few feet away, are among the more noteworthy relics in this 'junk yard'.

Many half-blasted, bomb-proof shelters stretch down the shore, and at least two of the movable metal pillboxes are found just inland today. Gone, however, are the small-calibre, field gun and machine gun nests that dotted the coastline, as well as the log barricade at the shoreline that contributed to making Betio the most fortified small island in the Pacific War.

The most common war remains on Betio are the expended shells of both Japanese and American manufacture, which local children are continuously bringing home. However not all ammunition finds are harmless. Even 30 years after the war (and ten years after a UK demolition team removed 92 tons of explosives), the local newspaper reports discoveries of unexploded bombs, shells, hand grenades, and small arms ammunition. For example, this item appeared in the Atoll Pioneer November 1, 1973:

'A 1,000 pound World War II bomb, which was found in the grounds of the Marine Training School at Betio, was detonated yesterday by Major Clifton Jeffries of the British Army. Major Jeffries, the senior ammunition technical officer at the Land Forces Headquarters at Hong Kong, had flown in specially for the task. The bomb was exploded near one of the old Japanese bunkers at Takarongo Point. It had been lifted from its hole at the School, gently put on the front end loader vehicle belonging to GEIDA, and driven slowly and carefully to another, specially dug, hole at Takarongo. Because of the danger, the area had been cleared and police guarded the houses of people who had been ordered to evacuate while the bomb was taken to the beach.'

Other discoveries are made under less favourable circumstances that remind Betio's inhabitants that they are still living on a powder keg. There are frequent incidents of buried bombs, grenades, and other ammunition exploding and injuring people when triggered by out-door fires built on top of them.

Only seventeen Japanese prisoners had been captured (and 129 Koreans) and the 4,690 estimated enemy dead were rather unceremoniously interred largely where they fell, in trenches and shell craters.

Adjustments to Marine Corps casualty figures continued to be made until August 26, 1952 when all WWII casualty lists were closed. Because of this, several conflicting totals of American casualties exist. The official US Army History gives the total killed, wounded and missing as 3,301 but the Navy History breakdown of 1,009 killed and 2,101 wounded totals 3,110. The Marine Corps, on the other hand break down their total of 3,373

A blasted Japanese bunker at Takarongo Point, Betio, with iron reinforcement bars protruding at all angles (Bartsch).

into: killed or missing 1,115; wounded 2,234 and combat fatigue 24!

Although a semi-permanent cemetery was laid out on Betio after the battle, many American graves could not be found especially near the airstrip in the rush to bulldoze the runway. Robert Sherrod revisited Betio in 1946 and commented that 'the shocking thing was the loss of many bodies; the Graves Registration people could find only about half of those who died on Tarawa, and only about 265 achieved the dignity of a marked grave. The odd thing was this: men were missing whom I had seen buried in graves marked by wooden crosses with names and serial numbers.'

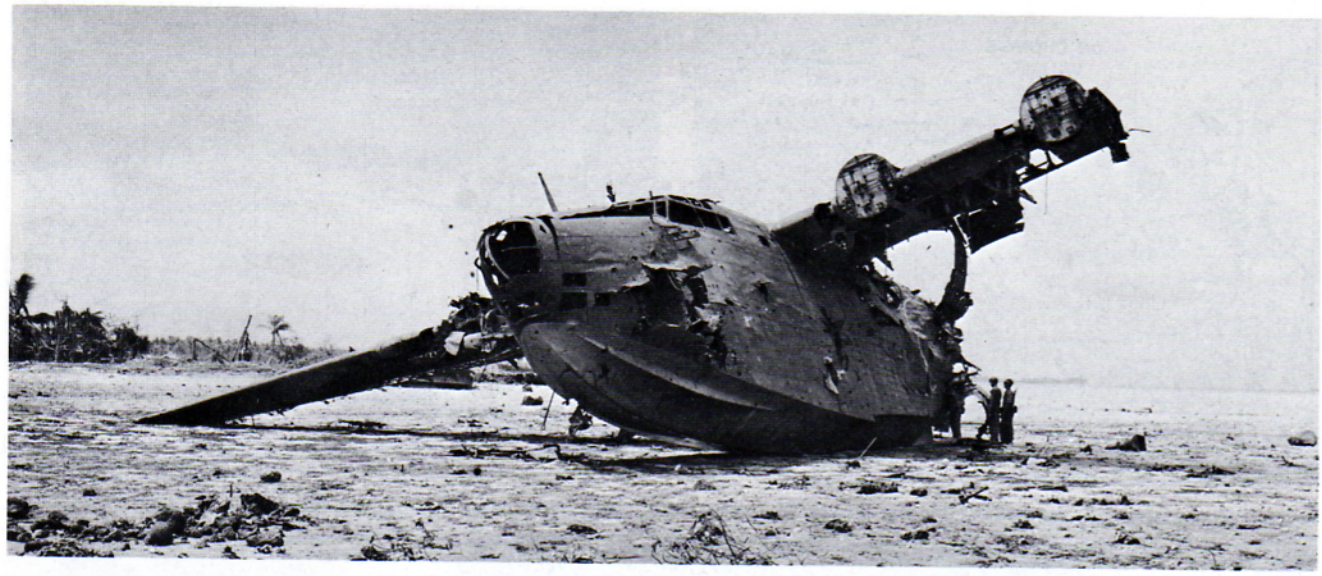
The remains from those graves that could be located were later removed to Hawaii by the American Graves Registration Service and then reinterred according to the wishes of the next-of-kin: repatriation to a private cemetery or interment in a national cemetery. Many now lie in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific at Honolulu while the missing are commemmorated on the Honolulu Memorial, featured in the opening sequence of the American TV programme 'Hawaii Five -O'. The site of the Battle and semi-permanent cemeteries on Betio is now an open space known as the Memorial Garden.

As only seventeen Japanese had survived the battle, there is no veteran tourist trade to the atoll from Japan. However in November 1976, ten sons and brothers of Japanese killed in 1943 arrived on Betio on a Bereaved Family Tour. According to the custom of Buddhists, one chants every year for thirty-three years after the loss of a loved one. This final chant was to take place in the Memorial Garden.

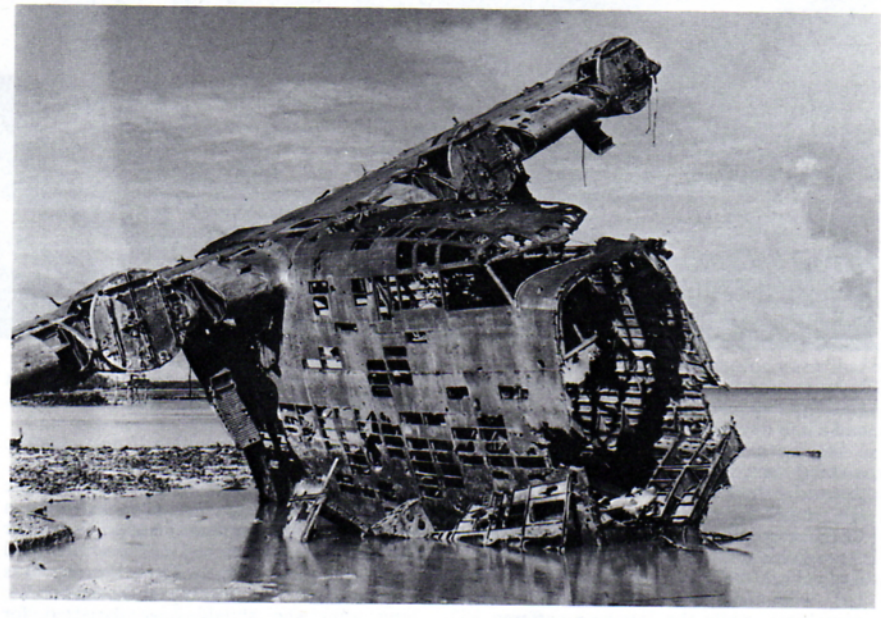
After the battle, Admiral Nimitz's planning officer, Captain James Steele drew up a report listing one hundred mistakes which had been made during the Tarawa landing. General Holland M. Smith, with hindsight, stated that 'Tarawa should have been bypassed. Its capture was a terrible waste of life and effort.' On the other hand, as with the Dieppe landing in the European Theatre, the Marine Corps historian believed that the losses were justified as they helped correct, improve and so reduce casualties in later landings. This was proved when the Marshall Islands were invaded ten weeks later and at the landing on Kwajalein in January 1944.

Above: **One of the Battle cemeteries on Betio. Each simple stake marks the body of a Marine killed in combat. The 2nd Marine Division CP was behind the emplacement on the left (IWM).** *Below:* **The same area laid out after the battle as a permanent cemetery.**

Below: **Today the cemetery site has been laid out as a Memorial Garden.**



MAKIN ATOLL
The Carlson Raid



Top: **The wreck of a Japanese 'Emily' flying boat, one of four strafed at Makin by Hellcat fighters on September 18 just off King's Wharf. The holes were caused by shells fired by four Shermans to wipe out eighteen Japanese using the wreck as a defensive point on November 21, 1943. The engines were apparently removed by the Japanese following its loss two months earlier (US Army).** *Above:* **Today, the 'Emily' still lies on the lagoon beach, but has lost its nose and rear fuselage to the combined ravages of the elements and the natives (Bartsch).**

Makin Atoll, lying a hundred miles to the north of Tarawa had been seized by the Japanese on December 10, 1941. Rather than construct an airfield, the Japanese chose to build a seaplane base on the lagoon side of Butaritari Island.

The island was defended by only 44 men when, in the early hours of August 17, 1942, the 2nd Marine Raider Battalion, consisting of 221 Marines commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Evans F. Carlson, landed from two US submarines, the *Nautilus* and the *Argonaut*. By 5.45 a.m. Government House had been occupied without opposition and the position of the main Japanese force had been pinpointed near On Chong's Wharf. The *Nautilus* brought gunfire to bear on the area and the Marines fought several spirited battles with the defenders. Japanese aircraft strafed and bombed the island during the afternoon but two seaplanes attempting to land in the lagoon were destroyed.

Although the Marines began to withdraw from the island's southern shore at 5.00 p.m., because of heavy surf the evacuation was not completed until the evening of the second day. Thirty Marines had lost their lives. While the raid was a morale-booster for the Americans, it led General Holland M. Smith of the Marine Corps to later call it a 'piece of folly' which had only served to encourage the Japanese to fortify the Gilbert Islands so that the subsequent American task to capture them was far more costly than it should have been.

The Japanese reconnoitred Butaritari on August 19 by seaplane and, finding no trace of the Americans, landed a new garrison on September 12. Nine Marines found marooned on the island were captured and taken to Kwajalein, where they were beheaded in October. On September 15, the Yokosuka 6th Special Naval Landing Force landed on Tarawa and detachments were subsequently sent to Butaritari. Within a month of the Carlson Raid, Japanese strength in the Gilberts had risen twenty-fold.

Butaritari Island, being long and thin, was awkwardly shaped for defence. The Japanese therefore resorted to the stockade principle, sealing of the ends of the island by constructing two fifteen-foot deep anti-tank ditches across the island, barely five hundred yards wide at that point. Within this main defensive area were situated the three piers — On Chong's Wharf, King's Wharf and Stone pier. Barbed-wire, trip wires, pillboxes, machine gun emplacements and rifle pits protected the tank barriers from frontal assault. Lieutenant Seizo Ishikawa commanded the garrison of 798 men although of these, only 300 were Japanese combat troops.

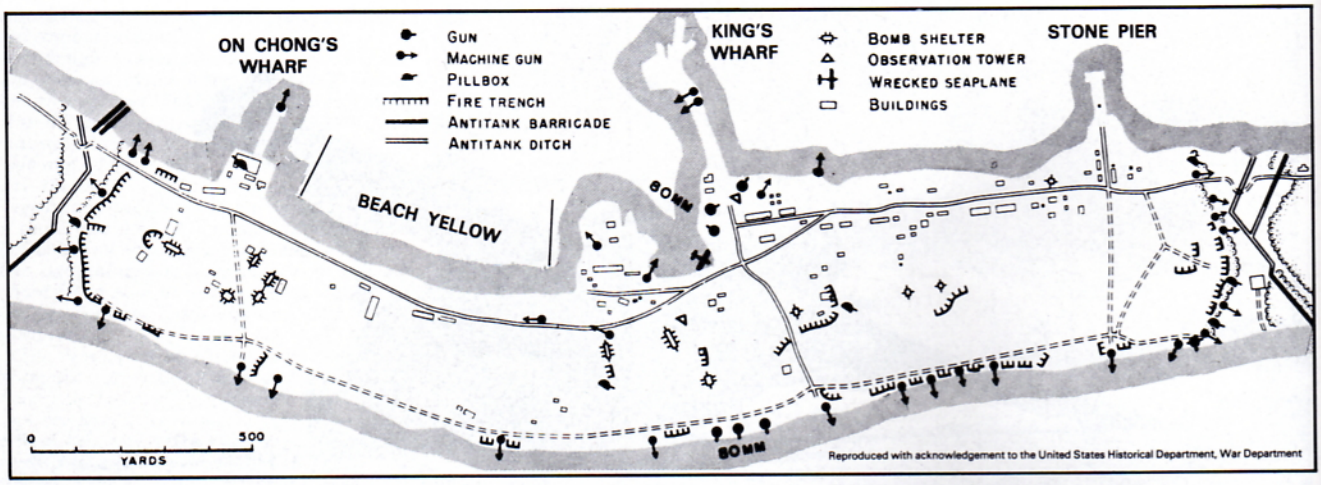
November 20, 1943

The American plan for the assault, to be carried out simultaneously with that on Tarawa, called for landings both outside and inside the main defence area. The 27th Infantry Division assigned their 165 RCT for the task, which sailed direct for 'Makin', as the Americans incorrectly called Butaritari, from Pearl Harbour.

After the preliminary softening up by carrier-planes and naval forces, the 1st and 3rd Battalions landed on Red Beach 1 and 2 on the western seaward end of the island at 8.30 a.m., only one minute after H-Hour. The reef on this shore of Butaritari lies only forty yards offshore and the amtracs safely conveyed the infantry to the beach with only two casualties. The follow up waves had more trouble in beaching their landing craft on the boulder-strewn beach and it was only the lack of enemy fire which avoided turning the resulting confusion into a disaster. The infantry advance up the island, against no opposition, through a pond-studded area of thick jungle was, according to General Smith, 'infuriatingly slow.'

At 10.40 a.m., the first amtrac of the 2nd Battalion landed on Yellow Beach situated within the lagoon in between the East and West tank barriers against minor Japanese fire, one amtrac actually running up the seaplane ramp on King's Wharf. Thirteen Sherman tanks followed up within minutes.

Following the two successful landings, the infantry failed to seize the advantage with their ten to one superiority. General Holland Smith lived up to his nickname of 'Howling Mad' Smith and described the 27th Division operation as a 'miserable, dilatory performance, giving the enemy ample time to reorganise and dispute every step.' Strong language but the fact remains that, having landed troops both within and without the



Above: **Map of the main Japanese defensive area on Butaritari.**

Below: **The same area photographed June 15, 1969 from 5,000ft.**

Japanese camp, the advantage slipped away and fighting continued thereafter for three and a half days.

During the second day, the Army units were making such slow progress that the General stormed ashore to see what was the matter. His temper was not improved during the night when nervous Army sentries fired shots through his command post tent. At the end of it all, the 27th Division had lost 64 killed and 152 wounded, (including 35 'non-battle' casualties), while the Japanese suffered 550 killed with 105 prisoners-of-war, many of them Korean labourers. The official US Army historian comments that 'in view of the tremendous superiority of American ground forces to those of the enemy' (6,472 Americans to 800 Japanese of whom 500 were Korean construction labourers), 'and the comparatively weak state of Japanese defenses, the ratio of American combat casualties to those of Japanese combat troops was remarkably high.'

This ratio looks appalling if one adds the 687 naval personnel lost in the operation. Forty-three men had been killed on the battleship *Mississippi* in an explosion in a turret during the bombardment on November 20, and 644 officers and enlisted men died when the escort carrier *Liscombe Bay* was torpedoed on the morning of November 24; long after she should have departed for Hawaii had the capture of Butaritari been carried out promptly.

One could have spent more time profitably on Tarawa, but air schedules dictated three-day sojourns on Butaritari, 100 miles to the north, and Abemama, 90 miles to the southeast. Butaritari — or 'Makin' as it was erroneously called by the Americans during the War — has less to offer the relic-hunter than does Tarawa, but was still worth the visit.

After boarding the four-engine DeHaviland Heron of Air Pacific for the 50-minute flight from Tarawa airport on Bonriki Island to Butaritari, I was invited by the pilot, Kava Konrote, to occupy the empty co-pilot's seat for a better view of the atoll's lagoon and, hopefully, of the three Kawanishi 'Emily' flying boats reportedly lying submerged in the lagoon water just off of King's Wharf. They burned and later sank after a strafing attack by aircraft of the USS Lexington in the carrier strike of September 18, 1943 on Butaritari and Tarawa. Although we dropped low and searched the lagoon closely for signs of the three Japanese planes on our approach to the airfield, we could see nothing that suggested

Left: **This is one of the seven pillboxes on Butaritari Island, which were constructed by the Japanese during wartime, now put to the practical use of providing a pen for a black pig.**

Right: **A Japanese water cistern on Butaritari today, gradually being reclaimed by the jungle, still showing the effects of shelling in November 1943 (Bartsch).**

Above: **This unusual, octagonal, concrete construction defied identification by William Bartsch whilst on Butaritari although undoubtedly of Japanese wartime construction.**

Above: **A rusting relic of one of the six railway traction units which the Japanese intended using on a narrow gauge railway to be constructed on Makin (Bartsch).**

their presence. On shore, I would not be able to examine them, as I had no diving gear and they lie in such dirty water that even divers cannot see them clearly.

Once aground, there was no problem locating the fourth 'Emily' known to be on Butaritari, however. On the motorbike trip to the Government rest house from the airport, we found it lying on the beach near King's Wharf, just to the right of the road, just as it was pictured in wartime photos. This plane was attached to the 802 kokutai (Naval Air Group) for patrol missions when it was surprised in the September 18 raid and badly damaged; it was subsequently dragged up on the beach where it was used as a defensive point in opposing the US landings in November 1943. Today all that remains of the 'Emily' is half of the fuselage and its wings (minus engines); the local inhabitants through the years have stripped off bits and pieces of the plane for their own purposes, including the fabrication of aluminium combs.

The fighting for Butaritari was concentrated in a 3,000-yard stretch of Butaritari Island, just to the south of the main village and running across the island from shore to shore, at the extremeities of which were constructed deep tank traps. It is within this defensive area that the other relics of the November 1943 battle are found today.

One of the seven pillboxes used by the Japanese is still much in evidence, an eight-foot diameter concrete structure with a field of fire to the west, covered with sand and grass (and in November 1974 occupied by a big black pig hostile to any closer examination of its quarters!). About 200 yards to the east, one finds a 12-foot high reinforced-concrete structure, pockmarked by shell hits, that served as a water cistern for Japanese forces on Butaritari, one of the few examples of their use of cement on the island. Nearby, is what appears to be a junk yard of Japanese equipment, mainly comprised of several chassis of a type of Japanese tracked vehicle (and each clearly stamped, in English, 'Kato Works, Shinagwa, Tokyo'!). Subsequent research indicates that these are three of the six narrow-gauge, four-cylinder, gasoline-driven railway traction units that the Japanese had planned to use for a small railway on Butaritari.

Just off a path crossing the island near the location of the former western tank barrier (of which no trace exists today) I found the live warhead of a 14-inch naval shell fired by one of the three US battleships that bombarded the island in November 1943 prior to the landings. (In December 1974 it was detonated by a demolition squad).

The only other war relic of significance on Butaritari is the skeleton of a US PBY 'Catalina' flying boat on the grounds of the Catholic Mission, where it was apparently dumped following a crash during the war.

The Americans wanted 'Makin' as a forward bombing base for attacks on the Marshalls, and within two months of its seizure, a 7,000-foot airfield — Starmann Field — was constructed on Butaritari Island some distance to the north of the Japanese defensive positions. The field is still in operation today, though only about one-half of its length is used, as this is all that is required to get the small DeHaviland Heron airborne.

There are no aircraft or other war relics lying in the vicinity of Starmann Field today, despite its heavy use during late 1943 and 1944. However, out in the lagoon water and on a line with the airfield lies the wreck of a US fighter plane, its wing visible at low tide. According to Teroron Batiara, a Gilbertese who lived on Butaritari during the war and witnessed the event, the ill-fated fighter was trying to land at Starmann Field in early 1944 on return from a raid in which it had been damaged, but its approach was blocked by another aircraft on the field. Circling to make a new approach, it caught fire and plunged in a flaming arc into the lagoon.

Below: **This unexploded 14-inch naval warhead from a US battleship was detonated in December 1974 (Bartsch).**

The twisted wreckage of a US PBY Catalina flying boat in the grounds of the Catholic Mission on Butaritari Island, Makin Atoll (Bartsch).

The 8,000ft runway on Abemama photographed on June 16, 1969 for the Directorate of Overseas Surveys. The airbase, constructed early in 1944, was named O'Hare Field; today only a small section of runway is used to link the atoll with the outside world.

ABEMAMA ATOLL

The third, virtually bloodless, landing in Operation Galvanic took place on the atoll of Abemama, seventy-five miles to the south-east of Tarawa. The atoll was only lightly defended by the Japanese who had withdrawn most of their men to Tarawa.

The 5th Amphibious Reconnaissance Company, consisting of 68 Marines and 10 bomb-disposal engineers commanded by Captain James L. Jones, were being transported to Abemama on the night of November 19/20 by the submarine *Nautilus* when she was fired at as a suspected enemy vessel and hit by the US destroyer *Ringgold* as the latter approached Tarawa with the invasion fleet. (Rear-Admiral Harry Hill, commanding the Tarawa force, accepted full responsibility for the accident). Commander William D. Irvin dived the submarine quickly and she was in great danger of sinking for two hours. However the damage control party on board worked so well and so fast that she was able to carry on with her voyage to Abemama. At midnight on November 20/21 the *Nautilus* lay 3,000 yards off the southernmost island of the atoll group.

The Marines had great difficulty in making a landfall in the six large rubber landing boats and they finally came ashore on the end of Kenna island after having nearly come to grief on the barrier reef. The next day, the Marines carted all their weapons and supplies along the beach to the planned landing position where their Australian scout officer, Lieutenant George Hard, was recognised by a native. He informed the Marines that the Japanese were stationed on another island two miles north and totalled twenty-five men.

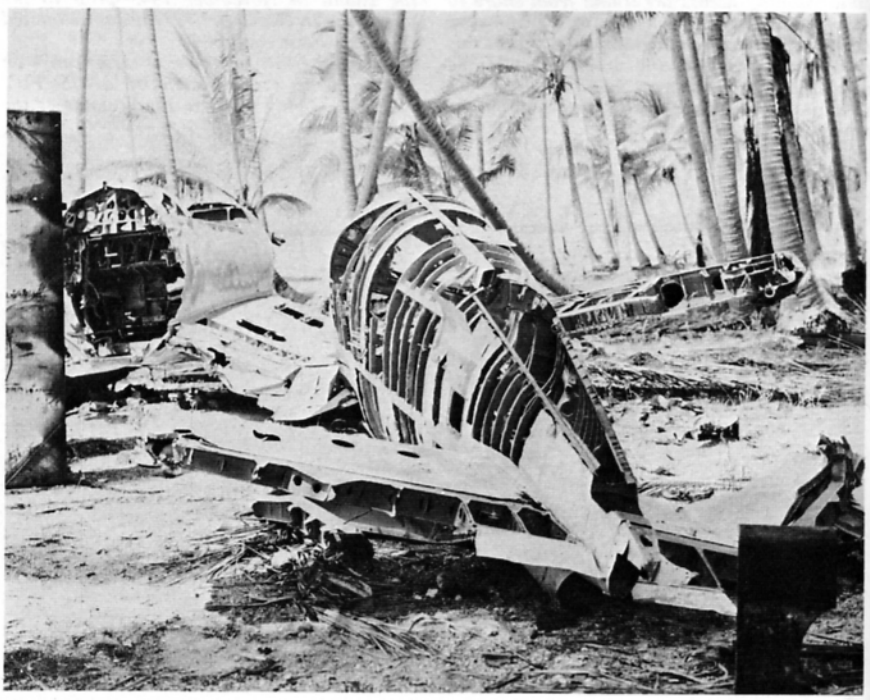
Although Captain Jones' force was only intended to reconnoitre Abemama, for a main assault force due on November 26, he decided to press on and attack the Japanese. Using native guides, they advanced to the edge of the channel separating them from the Japanese-held island. Then, having signalled for supporting fire from the *Nautilus*, he began the attack.

The Japanese replied with a vigorous fire from machine guns and, after one Marine was killed, Captain Jones decided there was no need for them all to die storming the island. They waited and, shortly after noon on November 25, a native came to report that all the Japanese were dead; fourteen having been killed by the *Nautilus* gunfire, the remainder having committed suicide.

The next day the 3rd Battalion of the 6 RCT Marines from Tarawa arrived to occupy the northernmost island and prepare for the construction of the airfield.

After the trip to Butaritari, Abemama remained the only unexplored atoll of my three-week journey. The 'Island of Moonlight' — reputed the most beautiful in the Gilberts — was however the least rewarding for a war-relic hunter. This might have been expected, however, for no real battle took place in its occupation by American forces in November 1943.

Although Abemama was mainly wanted as an advanced naval base, it proved more valuable as an air base. One month after the



Broken in half at the cockpit and missing its engine and outer port wing, this is the wreck of Ted Thurnau's Corsair fighter from Marine Fighter Squadron 422 following its take-off crash in February 1944. The propeller lies a few feet away (Bartsch).

US occupation, a 8,000-foot airfield — O'Hare Field — was constructed of live coral and subsequently used as a bomber base. Today, half of the field is still in use, linking the atoll with Tarawa to the north and Tabiteuea to the south three times a week on Air Pacific's Gilbert Islands services.

I found no trace of O'Hare Field's great activity in the war during a detailed search of the airfield area. However, about one and a half miles down the dusty road from the eastern end of the airfield, near the village of Tanimainiku, I found the wreck of a Corsair fighter, broken in half just beyond the cockpit and missing its engine and the outer half of its left wing. Tracing the history of this plane has been most difficult, for no Marine Corps fighter squadron was based on Abemama and no serial number could be found in the wreck. However, it appears that this plane must be that of Lieutenant Ted Thurnau of Marine Fighter Squadron 422, who, in taking off from Abemama on February 28, 1944 after a stop-over on the atoll during the squadron's transfer flight to Engebi in the Marshalls from Funafuti, was killed when the left wing of his Corsair folded and the plane crashed. Indeed, the missing outer left wing of the wreck could be attributed to its folding and breaking off in flight. The official history for Marine Fighter Squadron 422 confirms that 'the left wing locking pin worked out of the locked position just as the Corsair was airborne'.

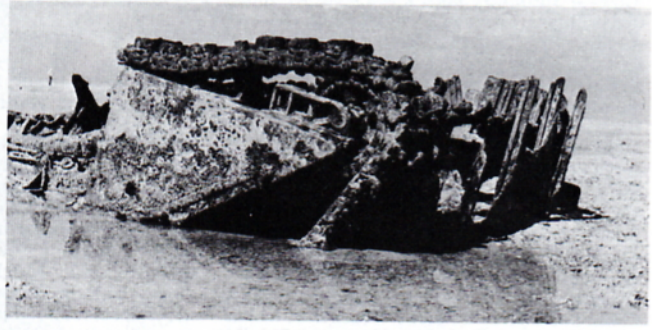
In addition to the Corsair wreck, there are bits and pieces of one or more B-24 Liberators on Abemama, scattered over a very wide area. These include a wing and an engine in the village of Tabiang south of the airfield, another wing near the Corsair wreck, and part of a fuselage a few hundred yards up the road from Tanimainiku.

Before going to Abemama, I had heard of the existence of the remains of a US underground radio receiving station, but initial inquiries among the local population produced negative responses. Eventually, however, two workmen at the Seventh Day Adventist Mission on the island were able to lead me to its location; they had played near it as children 30 years ago. The station turned out to be a snake-like corrugated iron structure covered with sand and growth about 120 feet long. It had caved in several places, but still could be explored inside. However, no trace of its wartime use was found.

The remains of the radio station (Bartsch).

The radio station was the last of the many relics of the war in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands that I found on my trip. Many, particularly those on Tarawa, are already known to travelers to these islands, but I believe mine must have been the first systematic attempt to locate and identify individual items on all six atolls.

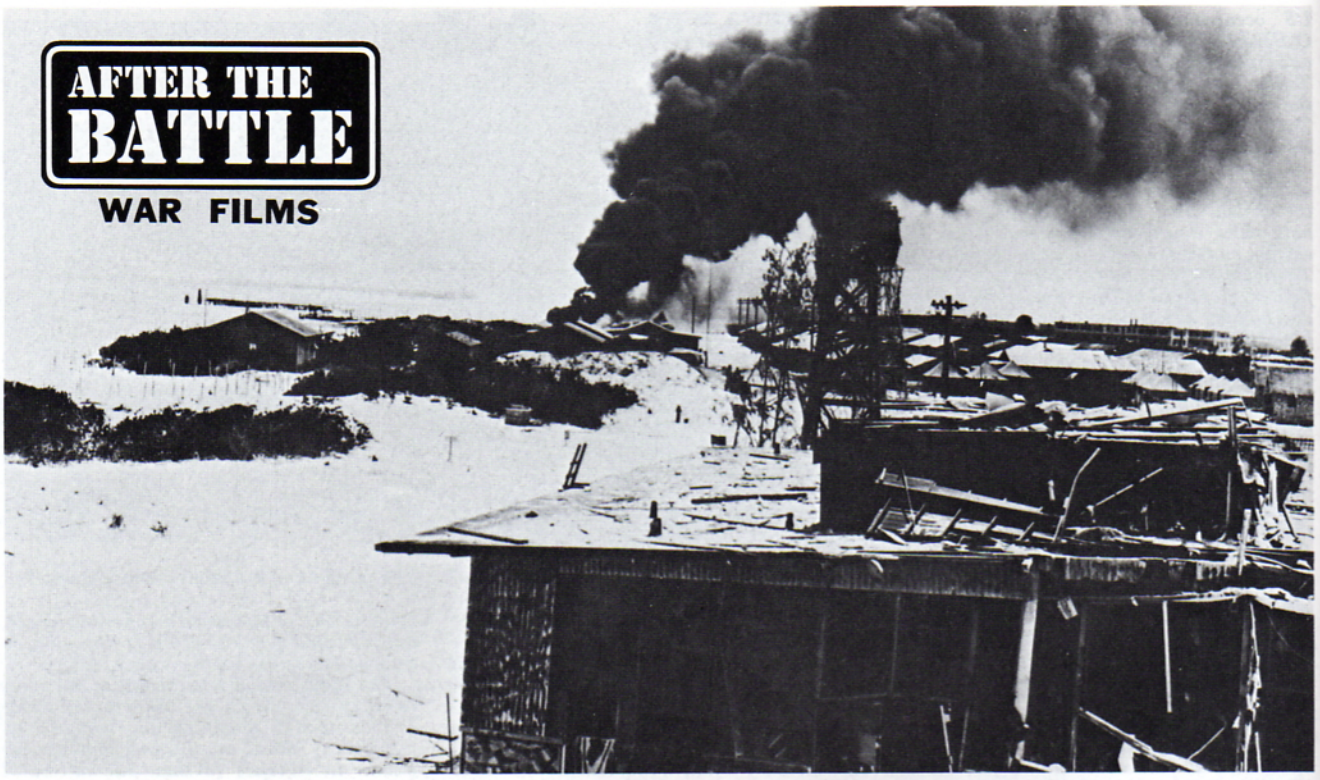
Above: **Four months after the assault on Betio, a Japanese Type 95 light tank and three US amtracs lie immobilised on one of the landing beaches (National Archives, Navy).**



Left: **The final resting place of this Type 95 tank is a sandspit extending out from the ocean beach of Betio, where it was moved from its original location.** *Above:* **Only the distinctive track of the foreward section remains to identify this ruin on Green Beach at Temakin Point, Betio, as one of the 125 amtracs used in the landings on Betio 31 years earlier (Bartsch).**

AFTER THE BATTLE

WAR FILMS



THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY

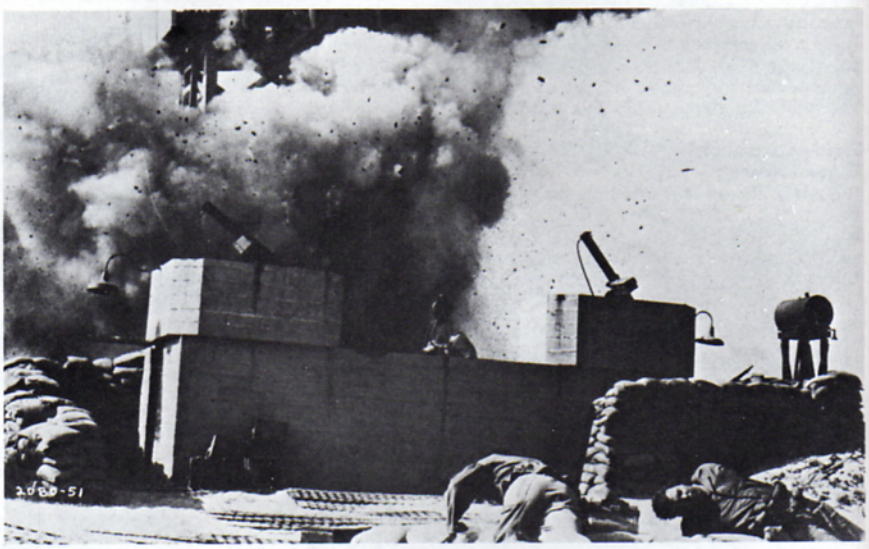
The release of 'The Battle of Midway' by the Mirisch Corporation is a timely addition to the Pacific theme of this issue of *After the Battle*.

While the film is an accurate account of the Battle of Midway, which began on June 4, 1942, instead of sticking exactly to fact, the producer has chosen to include a fictional 'Captain Matt Garth' played by Charlton Heston, around whom the main story is told. However, perhaps we can excuse the producer's licence as Charlton Heston himself served in the Pacific War as a B-29 radio operator. Likewise the other two leading stars are veterans of the Pacific: Admiral Chester W. Nimitz is portrayed by the ubiquitous Henry Fonda (who actually served under Nimitz on Guam), and Glen Ford plays Admiral Raymond A. Spruance.

For Glen Ford, the filming of Midway turned the clock back thirty-three years as his ship was part of Task Force 16 under the real Admiral Spruance. Ford was a member of the Coast Guard assigned to naval duty and was stationed in a picket boat that was deployed forward while the Task Force waited in ambush for the Japanese fleet. Later he joined the Marine Corps and is now a Captain in the US Navy Reserves.

Other well-known stars have been chosen to act out the roles of real-life Americans, among them being James Coburn as Captain Vinton Maddox; Hal Holbrook as Commander Joseph Rochefort Jr.; Robert Mitchum as Admiral William F. Halsey; Cliff Robertson as Commander Carl Jessop and Robert Wagner as Admiral Nimitz' aide, Lieutenant-Commander Ernest Blacke. Crocker of Kojak fame (Kevin Dobson) also appears as Ensign George Gay. On the Japanese side, Toshiro Mifune portrays Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, and James Shigeta plays Vice-Admiral Chuichi Nagumo.

The film is based on the book of the same name by Donald S. Sanford published by Corgi although the New English Library have tried to cash in on the film publicity by bringing out another paperback of the same name by Peter C. Smith using a blatant crib of the film artwork on the front cover.

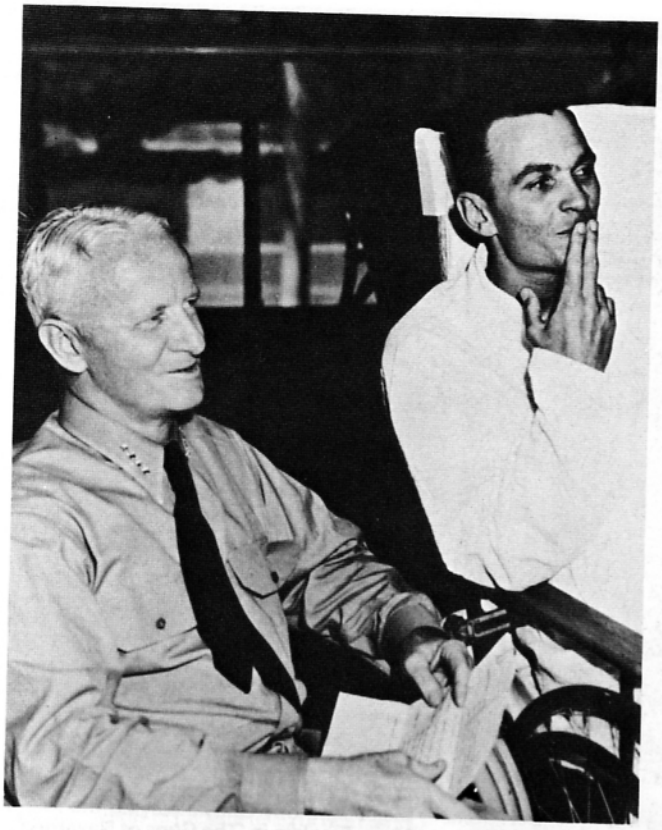


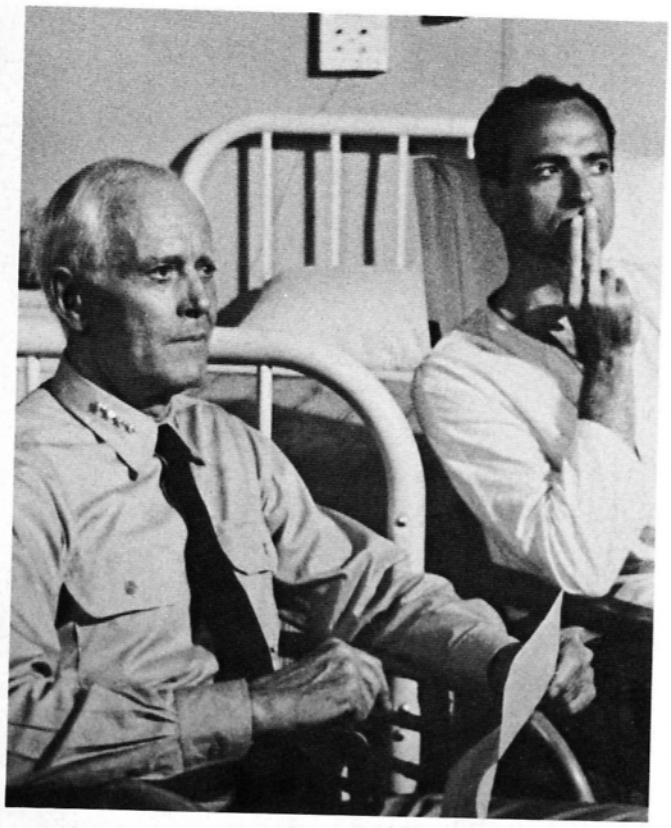
Top: **A photograph taken during the real Japanese attack on Midway in June 1942 and,** *above,* **a scene of the same attack depicted in the film 'The Battle of Midway'.**

The opening sequence, showing the Doolittle B-25 Mitchell bombing raid over Japan, with the 'Sensurround' sound system is very spectacular but one's enthusiasm is immediately dampened as an MB jeep appears (and reappears prominently throughout the film) with a one-piece windscreen.

The rest of the film is also a bit of a let-down as many of the ground attack scenes as well as the flying sequences are cuts from Tora! Tora! Tora! It is always annoying when film companies underestimate the intelligence of their audience, working on the premise that the public will not notice the same shots even though they try to disguise them by reversing the film left to right. We see the same B-17 runway crash; the same PBY Catalina exploding and the same sunrise carrier take-offs. To the editor and his son, shaking and vibrating in their plush seats to the throbbing sound effects of the 'Sensurround' system, every clip was easily recognized. (Mirisch are very fond of doing this as aviation fans well know from '633 Squadron' and 'Mosquito Squadron'.

Director Jack Smight claims in the press hand-out that their new film has been in-





A unique then and now comparison taken by Universal Studios during the filming of 'The Battle of Midway'. *Left:* **An Associated Press photograph of Admiral Nimitz, C-in-C of the US Pacific Fleet, and Ensign George Gay, sole survivor of thirty officers and men of Torpedo Squadron 8 that attacked the Japanese fleet, in hospital at Pearl Harbour.** *Right:* **Henry Fonda, who portrays Admiral Nimitz and Kevin 'Crocker' Dobson playing Ensign Gay pose for a reconstruction of the 1942 photograph.**

tegrated with original war footage although the definition of modern 35mm cameras and film make this a little implausible. The combat film is always recognisable by its deep blue cast. Perhaps, to the ordinary member of the public, this does not notice, but this is a magazine for enthusiasts and to them it will be obvious. Nevertheless, this footage is very spectacular especially with 'Sensurround' although many shots are duplicated and triplicated. 'Captain Garth's' son's deck crash is the one well-known to all war enthusiasts, filmed during the Battle of Leyte Gulf in October 1944, where the F6F Hellcat breaks in half—the director probably hoping that audiences would not know that only F2 Buffalo and F4F Wildcat fighters were flown at Midway. The Hellcat did not even make its maiden flight until three weeks after the Battle of Midway!

'The Battle of Midway' was filmed at the US Naval Air Training Command Base in Pensacola, Florida; at sea, aboard the aircraft-carrier *Lexington;* on Stage 22 at Universal Studios and at other locations in California including Fort Macarthur, the Long Beach Naval Base, Terminal Island, Point Mugu naval facilities and the Huntington Library's Japanese Gardens in Pasadena.

The *Lexington* is the only World War II carrier still in service with the US Navy. She was launched on September 26, 1942 following the sinking of the fourth Lexington on May 8, 1942 during the Battle of the Coral Sea, fought a few weeks before Midway. By the end of the war, the *Lexington* claimed her aircraft had sunk 900,000 tons of shipping and destroyed 850 aircraft. She is now a training aircraft carrier.

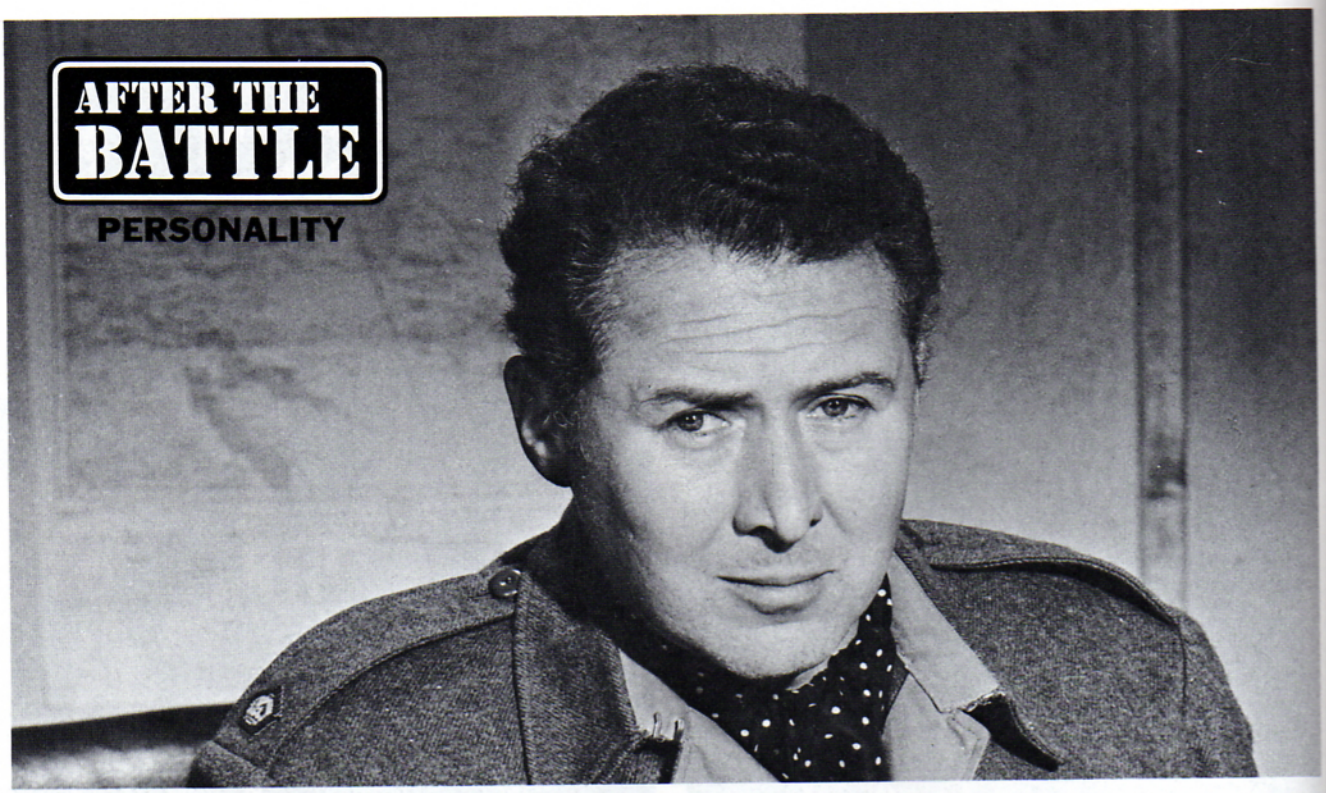
The fifty-odd film cast and crew of the *Lexington,* assigned quarters on the carrier, found that the re-creation of authentic action was helped by the atmosphere of living and working aboard the ship. Volunteers from amongst the normal complement of 1,500 officers and men (during the war 2,900) agreed to lose prized moustaches and beards to play extras and Reading Room One was converted into a barber's shop. The floor was covered with a thick carpet of hair by the time the make-up men had finished giving short back and sides to 500 men!

The *Lexington* doubles as the *Yorktown* and the *Enterprise,* the aircraft carriers of Task Forces 16 and 17 in the real Battle of Midway in which the *Yorktown* was sunk, from the combined effects of torpedoes and bombs, on June 17, 1942. The problems of filming on a modern aircraft carrier are the radar antenna and give-away angled flight deck and, although the director says they tried to avoid letting these show, the latter is apparent in at least one aerial shot.

Both Hal Holbrook and Kevin 'Crocker' Dobson were able to meet their real-life counterparts when Joseph Rochefort Jr. and George Gay visited the filming at the Naval Station in Terminal Island which doubles for Pearl Harbour.

It was during the filming at Universal Studios that the two opposing Admirals (who never met in real life) came face to face in the persons of Henry Fonda and Toshiro Mifune. After shaking hands, exchanging gifts and autographed photographs, Mifune prophesied that, 'If the two admirals had met in real life, there would probably not have been a war'.

Below: **Members of the cast in front of a Grumman F4F Wildcat aboard the USS Lexington.**



Major Anthony Quayle

In September 1939, Anthony Quayle was already a veteran of ten years stage acting, and was approaching his twenty-sixth birthday. He had just completed a Mediterranean tour with the Old Vic Company and, as soon as he returned to London, he enlisted in the Royal Artillery.

Within a few days, Gunner Quayle was sent to an Officer Training Unit at Plymouth, later moving to Shoeburyness. Then, as 2nd Lieutenant, he was posted to a Territorial unit, the Hampshire Heavy Regiment, which was manning forts around Spithead as part of Britain's coastal defences. Because of the 'weeks and months of wet, cold, miserable, boring non-activity during the winter of 1940, a phoney war within a phoney war' he decided, that, if the opportunity arose for a more exciting posting, he would do his utmost to get it. When a call came for volunteers for Hong Kong he put his name down with alacrity but, being marooned on a fort surrounded by water, had to rely on the duty boat to get him ashore. Unfortunately it failed to arrive on time and by the time he reached Woolwich, he was too late. Then, in the spring of 1940, he volunteered for a posting to Gibraltar and was accepted.

By the time he sailed, France was being overrun by the Germans and his ship put in at Cherbourg to land reinforcements. However no sooner had they done so than the same troops were ordered to re-embark and proceed to Gibraltar. When they arrived at the Rock, the unanswered questions as to whether or not Spain would enter the war; whether the Germans would attack or be allowed free passage through Spain all gave the place an air of expectant uncertainty. Lieutenant Quayle was put in charge of a pair of 6-pdr guns situated on the detached mole protecting the harbour, a role not dissimilar to the one he had striven so hard to leave in England. The only difference was, he recalls, that the casemates were full of bugs.

The troops manning the fixed defences were mainly regular soldiers and, from time to time, they would be rotated to other positions. When France surrendered, Quayle remembers the flood of evacuees from southern France. He spent an evening talking to Somerset Maugham on a coal boat and admired the discipline of a Czech artillery regiment who had extricated themselves from their own country, then from Poland and finally from France.

The Governor at the time was General Sir Clive Liddell and, when France surrendered, General Mason-Macfarlane arrived in Gibraltar as his second-in-command. Mason-Macfarlane had been Military Attache in Berlin, and had been the man who put up a plan for assassinating Hitler; he said his house offered a perfect view of the street down which Hitler often drove and where he could easily be shot with a rifle. He had even volunteered to do the job himself! Quayle says that he was 'a tiger of a man' and he soon got to know him well during the General's frequent inspections of the defences. He says that this association with 'Mason-Mac' had a great influence on his life.

When General Mason-Macfarlane realised that the young Lieutenant was Quayle the actor, he said he ought to get some entertainment going for the troops in the garrison theatre. Quayle says that the General must have been favourably impressed with his efforts as, when the Governor's ADC was posted, he recommended Lieutenant Quayle for the vacant post. Quayle remembers he accepted the position with 'mixed feelings, not holding a high regard for ADCs and not knowing quite what to expect. I spent the next few months in a completely different world' Later, when the Governor returned to England to become Inspector-General of Training, Quayle moved with him.

Soon however he had volunteered to join Special Forces, the secret organisation set up to organise a resistance movement in Britain in the event of the country being invaded. He was now a captain and was made Intelligence Officer for Northumberland although he says that by that time, late-1941, the main invasion scare had passed.

Their tasks were to build camouflaged hides and practise all the arts of undercover fighting. Frequently he would be the bait for exercises in stealth and still remembers one amusing incident, one cold winters' night, when his car represented a German tank. His men were ordered to approach and destroy it without being spotted.

Major Anthony Quayle playing the role of Major Franklin in 'The Guns of Navarone'.

It was snowing when Captain Quayle ordered his driver to pull over and, simulating the possible reactions of a German tank crew, he got out with the driver to have a smoke. Stamping their feet to keep warm, looking at the car from time to time, they waited on the road for three hours. At last, believing the men (who in civilian life were miners) had had to work late, they returned to the car. As Quayle opened the door, he saw two resistance men calmly smoking cigarettes in the back seat. Another emerged from beneath the car to which he proudly announced, he had just fitted a limpet mine. As he turned round, Quayle saw the rest of the patrol covering him with Sten guns. They had been within yards for the past two hours!

One of his patrol leaders remembers that the Captain himself was just as wily 'never coming into his house through a door if a window happened to be open!' In another exercise, in which Captain Quayle and a demolition officer were to 'attack' the 51 Highland Division in the dead of night, they entered the country house which served as Battalion HQ. After hiding thunderflashes, connected to time-pencils, set to detonate at intervals, they retired to a clump of rhododendron bushes to watch the fun. They didn't have long to wait. As the explosions rocked the building one after another, to their great amusement, there were sounds of Scotsmen cursing and blinding. As the doors burst open the joke turned sour as they heard a voice shout, 'Shoot the bastards', followed by the sound of clicking rifle bolts.

Captain Quayle's training in British resistance, illustrated in the following story, was to serve him in good stead later in the war as we shall see.

'On a course at Coleshill they told us to attack a wood in which they had a few old bits of metal and stuff pretending to be tanks in laager. I can remember coming up across a ploughed field in the middle of the night to attack this thing. Where the ploughed bit finished, there was a piece of grass verge at the edge of the wood which the farmer hadn't

ploughed up but had left to walk on. They had some staff — some Lovat's Scouts and people — walking around, simulating a perfectly ordinary German patrol. They came round regularly. *And* irregularly.

'I'd crawled slowly all the way up the ploughed field in a furrow, I'd got denims on and I was absolutely caked with mud. I was cold and miserable, too, and as brown as the field. "Well," I thought, "now here's where I get up to go across this grass verge before the sentry comes round."

'And — suddenly I heard him coming. He'd cut through the wood! Instead of going round he'd cut right through — and had come round again! I thought, "Well, here's where I lie still."

'And so I lay still. But my hands were up on the grass, poised to crawl over it. Brown and muddy, but there. And he came so close to me — he must have been within an inch of my fingers — that I felt the muddy ground give slightly under his foot.

'He walked off and I lay there for a bit, and then I crawled in and tied the thing on that I'd got to tie on and went away.

'He never saw me, and I asked him afterwards, "Were you kidding that you didn't see me? Or did you *really* not see me?" And this fellow said, "I didn't see anyone at all." '

It was during a leave in London that he again met, quite by chance, General Mason-Macfarlane who, after a spell as head of the British Military Mission in Moscow, was being sent to Gibraltar to take over as Governor two days hence. Then and there he said to Quayle that he wanted him as his military assistant and that he was to prepare to leave right away. Although he had thoroughly enjoyed his year with Special Forces, the invasion threat had long since faded and Quayle felt that service in Gibraltar might be more worthwhile. At that period of 1942, the preparations for Operation Torch made the Rock the focus for the invasion of North Africa.

When they reached Gibraltar, they found it the centre of terrific activity as engineers and miners worked to make it a defensible base. The arrival of the General served to galvanise these efforts even more to strengthen the fortress and it was confidently believed that, with the vast underground stores and provisions, Gibraltar could stand up against any attack. Quayle amusingly says that the German assault plan to capture the fortress, studied after the war, was so massive that it was obvious that they would not have lasted three days!

As part of the necessary intelligence build-up on the possible intentions of the Spanish, Quayle, now a Major, made several visits, albeit on a social level in civilian clothes, to meet his opposite numbers in the local Spanish garrisons. It was, as he says, intelligence of a low order but, nevertheless, useful.

This was an intensely interesting period of Quayle's war career as he was in a fortunate position to meet all the top personalities when they visited or passed through the Rock. Gibraltar was to be General Eisenhower's base for Torch, and Quayle remembers vividly the panic which ensued when the aircraft carrying a Royal Naval Officer, J. H. Turner, failed to arrive at Gibraltar in September. Turner had been carrying a letter addressed to General Mason-Macfarlane giving, in plain language, the planned date for the invasion. Orders from the War Office in London stated that the body must be found at all costs and the letter recovered unopened. When it was discovered that the body had been washed ashore at Cadiz, giving the Germans possible access to it, Quayle went to Spain as a member of the party to recover the body. Incredibly, he says, they found that Turner's flying suit had not been removed as the zip was still choked with sand. Quayle believes this accident gave Intelligence officers the idea to stage a similar accident again a few months later, using false documents, in Operation Mincemeat, better known now as 'the man that never was'.

Above: **Military assistants to the Governor of Gibraltar. Rear rank, L-R: Major Anthony Quayle, Squadron Leader Ken Gatwood, Captain David Woodford. Front row L-R: Major Capurro, General Mason-Macfarlane, the Governor, and Commander Brown.**

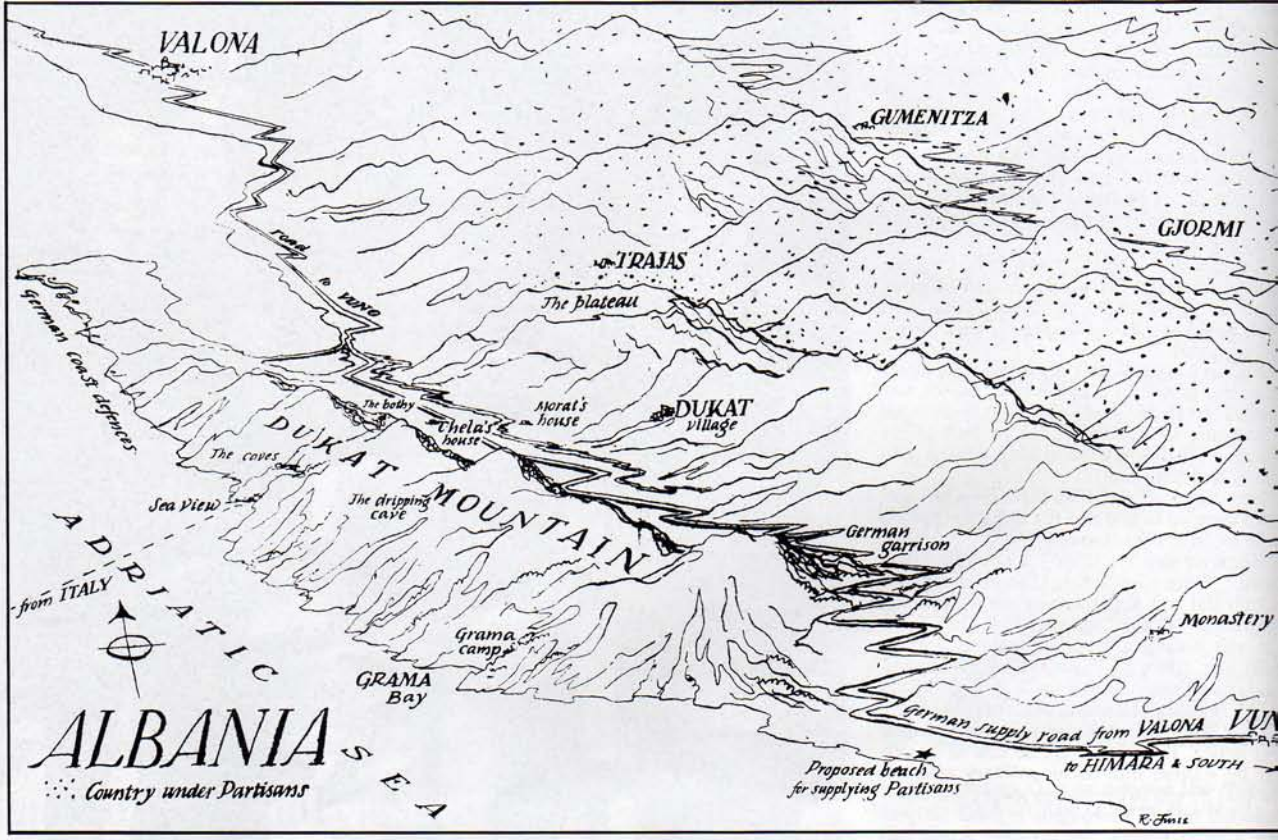
Quayle remembers clearly the first time he met Winston Churchill when he drove, alone, to the airstrip to collect him and convey him to Government House. 'Young man,' said Churchill, as they drove to the Governor's residence, 'are your prepared to sell your life dearly? You know that this old Rock is going to become the scene of dramatic events'. Seeing all the top men at work — Marshall, De Gaulle, Eisenhower, Churchill, Dill, Eden and many others — was an experience that made a great impression on the young Major.

Then, in July 1943, came the fateful visit to Gibraltar of the Polish General Sikorski on his return from Cairo. Major Quayle was initially concerned with the arrangements for the Polish General's arrival and remembers the amazement that greeted the signal from London that the Russian Ambassador, Ivan Maisky, would require to stay at the Governor's Palace at the same time. As General Mason-Macfarlane commented, 'Whitehall had, as usual, put its foot in it again'.

After a 'Whitehall farce', during which the Polish and Russian party were kept from bumping into each other, Major Quayle was one of the party standing on the tarmac, on the night of July 4 when General Sikorski's Liberator took off — only to crash moments later into the sea.

The third phase of Major Anthony Quayle's war began in Cairo, later in 1943. The Special Operations Executive (SOE) wanted men to

Major Quayle in Cairo during training for his mission behind enemy lines.



parachute into the Balkans to set up bases and make contact with the partisans opposing the occupying forces and to issue arms and equipment. Quayle was familiar with Greece and he volunteered (although he says he was persuaded) for that country. However the Greek civil war changed the situation and it was suggested he may, instead, like to drop behind Japanese lines. Quayle admits that he had no desire to be a hero in the Far East and so it was put to him that Albania would be the next best choice.

Anthony Quayle wrote at length of his SOE experiences in his book published in 1945 'Eight Hours from England'. Modestly, he wrote this in the style of a novel with 'John Overton' as the central character although this is really himself.

After parachute and demolitions training, aided by his previous experience with Special Forces, he felt he was well prepared for his journey. However, when the time came to leave, there was a change of plan. Instead of an aerial drop, he was to enter Albania by a small fishing boat the *Sea Maid* from Brindisi in Italy. He was to take charge of an area south of the port of Valona and run a small Allied base which had been established in a cove a few miles south of the town. The base had been christened 'Sea View'.

The SOE men were sent in wearing uniforms — in the vain hope that they would not be shot as spies if captured — but it was not long before wear and tear reduced them to the motley dress of the local inhabitants. The orders Quayle had been given were rather contradictory; reconnaissance, i.e. lying low and not drawing attention to the base, and secondly, killing Germans and helping the partisans and so doing exactly the opposite!

He departed for 'Sea View' on New Year's Eve 1943. As they approached the shore, fringed by high cliffs, they flashed the pre-arranged signal. There was an anxious moment until the reply was spotted whereupon the *Sea Maid* was stopped. A small canvas boat appeared out of the darkness and Quayle was welcomed to Albania by his naval officer contact.

situation. Communist partisans were fighting the Germans, to some extent, with weapons provided by the Allies. They were also fighting their political opponents — the right-wing Balli Kanbetar. It was hard to know with certainty which party attacked the other first, but the country was in the early stages of civil war. The Balli would co-operate with the Allies in supplying them with intelligence and maintaining secrecy as to their whereabouts, but they refused to attack the Germans as their villages would be destroyed and their capacity diminished to defend themselves against the partisans. They knew they would have their own war to fight against the Communists when the Allied war against Germany was won. Meanwhile, the Communist partisans, with absolute justification, could claim the arms and support due to them for fighting the Germans. The right wing being pushed into the role of 'collaborator

One of the first things Quayle tho necessary was to set up a second, emerg camp in case 'Sea View' was ever atta and, using villagers as guides, he reconno and chose a site to the south of Grama. It just as well that a new base was set up as View' soon became the focal point for Ita soldiers endeavouring to escape from Germans after the Italian armistice with Allies three months previously. More 40,000 Italians had already been deporte Germany.

Within a few days, Major Quayle had m contact with the Fifth Partisan Bri Political Commissar Besnik (now Albanian Minister of the Interior, H Kapo), with the intention of trying to ge

Anthony Quayle's own pencilled caption on this photo states: 'With the guerilla

two sides in the civil war to put aside their differences to fight the common enemy. The Communists said they needed more weapons but as they did not want arms to pass through 'Sea View', which was situated in Balli territory, they suggested that an alternative beach, which they controlled further south at Vuno, should be used. After inspecting and approving the beach, Quayle decided to return to the Fifth Brigade to prepare for the arrival of the arms and equipment. On the way back, while crossing the mountains, they had to hurriedly leave a small village, where they were sheltering for the night, when a German convoy drove up. Narrowly evading capture, they spent the rest of the night in the mountains.

No sooner had plans been laid to receive the shipment than news arrived at Grama that the Germans had moved into the Vuno area and had sent a company of men to occupy the nearby village of Dukat which lay on the route to the Fifth Brigade area. Then, a few days later on February 10, one of the Balli men arrived breathless at Grama with news that Germans were approaching the camp and that they must leave at once. Grabbing what they could, they prepared to depart.

'We began the climb,' wrote Quayle in his book 'digging our fingers into the ground, the loose shale slipping away beneath our boots. All about men were swarming up the scree. Grunting and panting we toiled upwards till we were on a level with the abandoned camp. The American sergeant, coming behind me, stopped for a moment to look back. Suddenly he gave a great cry.

"There they are! I seen 'em! I seen 'em!"

"Where are they, Butch?" I called over my shoulder.

"Coming into camp," he panted. "I seen 'em duck behind some rocks."

As I climbed on I thought: This is the end then. I have often wondered how it would come. Now I know. Any moment a bullet will smack into me, and a khaki bundle will go tumbling down the hill on to the beach.

I didn't think it *might* happen: I *knew* I was going to be killed — knew it so well that I asked myself why I bothered to claw my way up to the distant ridge. Why exert myself so painfully when death would overtake me in any case? Yet I had the feeling of taking part in a ritual; of being impelled to play the scene out to the end. So on I climbed as fast as my aching legs and arms would take me.'

Next morning when there was no sign of pursuit, Quayle decided to return to their camp which they could see deserted below them. There they discovered the truth: it had been a false alarm, and in their absence the camp had been ransacked.

Thereafter, because the location of the camp at Grama was now known to the Italians, more and more arrived in the hope of being shipped to Italy. It was now the depths of winter and Quayle remembers the deep snow on the hills and constant rain, rain, rain. The fighting between the right and left wing partisans was still continuing and there seemed no hope of organising concerted action against the Germans. Quayle felt frustrated that he had not achieved anything; in the meantime the Albanians were slowly destroying each other.

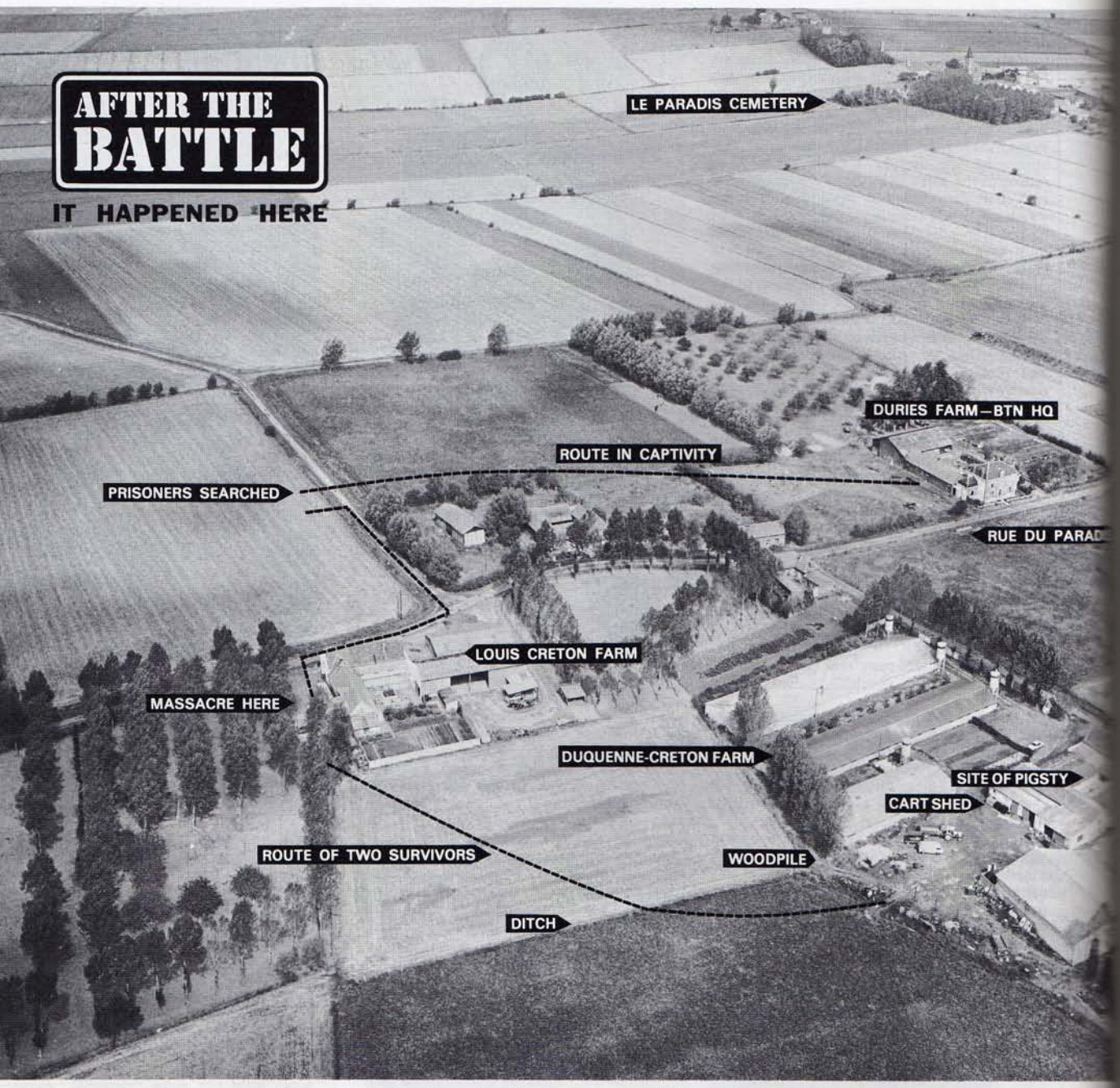
Then reliable news reached the camp of an approaching German patrol so once again they had to pack up and leave. As the Allied officers climbed wearily over the rocks and gullies in the miserable weather, their depression increased having been chased from their base a second time. They managed to find a new hiding place in a cave high in the mountains although the water, continually dripping from the roof, did nothing to raise their spirits.

And so it went on, day after day, moving from one mountain to another, talking, meeting with the partisans groups, cajoling and threatening; all in an attempt to get combined action against the Germans who were now retreating north from Greece. The Albanians themselves would only work, guard or shelter them for money and this was handed out in form of gold sovereigns — that is until one day when all the eight hundred in the kitty were stolen.

After weeks of hardship in the dreadful mountain conditions, Major Quayle went down with malaria and had to be evacuated across the Adriatic to Italy. After a month in hospital, he was well enough to return to evacuate his unit. It had been a frightful three months and, although there was little to show for it in acts of sabotage or destruction, the unit had kept a whole German brigade occupied in tracking them down.

Seventeen years later, having returned to his acting career after being demobbed in 1945, he starred in the memorable film which was to remind him more than any other of those months in Albania — 'The Guns of Navarone'. The surreptitious voyage by fishing boat; scaling the cliffs; the small unit living rough with the mission of attacking a German target in the Balkans — it was certainly a film to bring back memories for Major-Anthony Quayle.

Above: **Major Anthony Quayle as the real-life SOE agent in the snowy mountains of Albania.** *Right:* **Not dressed nearly so realistically as one of the agents in 'The Guns of Navarone'.**



MASSACRE AT LE PARADIS

In the last week of May 1940, the British rmy, hard pressed against the successful, ghtning advance of the German Army, was lling back to Dunkirk. By May 25, men of e 2nd Battalion of The Royal Norfolk egiment were dug in along the northern ank of La Bassee Canal ready to fight a arguard action against the SS Totenkopf ivision. The Division's intelligence had eported that they were faced by elite British egiments with orders to hold up the German dvance for as long as possible. The 2nd nfantry Regiment (IR2), commanded by tandartenfuehrer Bertling, was given the bjective of the small villages of Le Cornet lalo and Le Paradis, two and five kilometres espectively from the northern bank of the anal.

Le Cornet Malo was defended by 'A' ompany of the 2nd Norfolk Battalion with ompany 'D' on their left and 'B' and 'C' to the right and, by 3.00 a.m. on the morning of May 26, Battalion headquarters had been established behind this line at Duries Farm, just five hundred yards west of the cross-roads in Le Paradis. Half-an-hour later, the Germans opened a determined attack against 'B' company, reaching Le Cornet Malo where house-to-house fighting took place. By early morning, both 'A' and 'B' companies reported they had been very hard hit and had lost most of their men, but, at midday, an order was received to hold the position to the last man.

Although things looked bad for the Norfolks, the Totenkopf Regiments had also suffered severe casualties. IR3, commanded by Standartenfuehrer Goetze, had occupied the north bank of the canal comparatively easily but the Advanced Operational Headquarters of the SS received wireless reports from IR2 that it had met extremely heavy resistance at Le Cornet Malo and, in particular, the 1st Battalion had suffered severely. The SS Divisional Commander ordered that both Le Cornet Malo and Le Paradis must be taken otherwise the flank of IR3 would be endangered.

May 27 was heralded at 3.30 a.m. by a heavy German barrage followed by an infantry attack in considerable strength and armoured vehicles assailed the remains of 'B' Company in Le Cornet Malo. The other Norfolk companies were similarly hard-pressed and, of the 184-strong 'A' Company, only a lieutenant and six men managed to reach Battalion HQ.

After the capture of Le Cornet Malo, the SS moved their battle headquarters into the village to direct the final assault on Le Paradis. It was flat, open country, dotted with isolated buildings and the remaining Norfolks prepared to make their last stand at the Duries Farm. Against them, IR2 deployed its

depleted 1st Battalion on the right, the 2nd (which had lost its Commander and all its Company Commanders) in the centre with the 3rd on the left.

Major Lisle Ryder posted the Norfolks around the outbuildings and windows of the farm itself. In the cellar, the Signals Section was trying to keep in contact with the various companies; a message from 'D' Company stated that only one officer and six men were left whilst 'C' company reported by telephone that they were being surrounded.

The Germans successfully worked their way towards the Battalion HQ under a barrage of mortar and small-arms fire. Major Ryder made a desperate, wireless appeal for artillery support but he was told none was available. The 1st Battalion of IR2 equally hard pressed in Le Paradis itself, had to call on the 3rd Battalion and reinforcements from IR3 to subdue resistance in the centre of the village.

Although Major Ryder tried to give assurances to his men that reinforcements were on their way, it was obvious to the defenders that they were in a desperate position. The cellar was crowded with wounded and shell-bursts rocked the building. Late in the afternoon, Major Ryder reported to Brigade that the position was hopeless and that all contact had been lost with the forward companies. He was told to hold out until evening and then try to fight his way out.

With dusk still hours away and ammunition running low, Major Ryder knew that this was impossible. He re-contacted Brigade and said that there was no hope without reinforcements and that the wireless must now be destroyed. A fire was lit in the cellar and orders given for all papers to be burnt and all equipment smashed and, in the farmyard above, the last lorry was set alight.

The CO then ordered the survivors to make for the cowshed, a solid, brick building which offered the best shelter from the enemy fire. Those manning the farmyard buildings and walls that were still alive, joined them. There were more than eighty soldiers in the thirty by twenty-foot building as Major Ryder explained the position.

He said they had all done more than could have been asked of them and that there was no hope of escape. They were entirely surrounded by superior enemy forces, and, he said, it was for them to decide whether to fight on or surrender. He asked for a show of hands, and the majority decided to surrender.

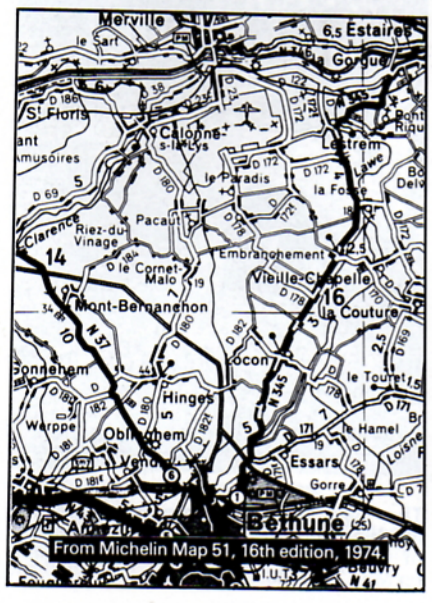
A white towel was tied to a rifle and the door into the field was opened. As the Sergeant-Major held the makeshift flag aloft, the men filed out to be greeted by a burst of machine-gun fire. Those not hit rushed back inside; the door was closed and the firing ceased. Five minutes later, another attempt at surrender was made and suddenly, from behind banks and ditches, Germans stood up shouting triumphantly and waving their rifles.

As the Norfolk survivors trooped into the meadow, some limping, with the wounded being assisted, they were quickly surrounded by SS of No. 3 Company of IR2 and for the first time they appreciated the superior numbers of their foe. As they entered the pasture, an English-speaking German officer ordered them across a minor road, and into a field where they were made to kneel. Then, five at a time, they were ordered to their feet to be searched. The Germans began to make a heap of gas masks, steel helmets, pay books and cigarettes, hitting with rifle butts any prisoner that refused to cooperate.

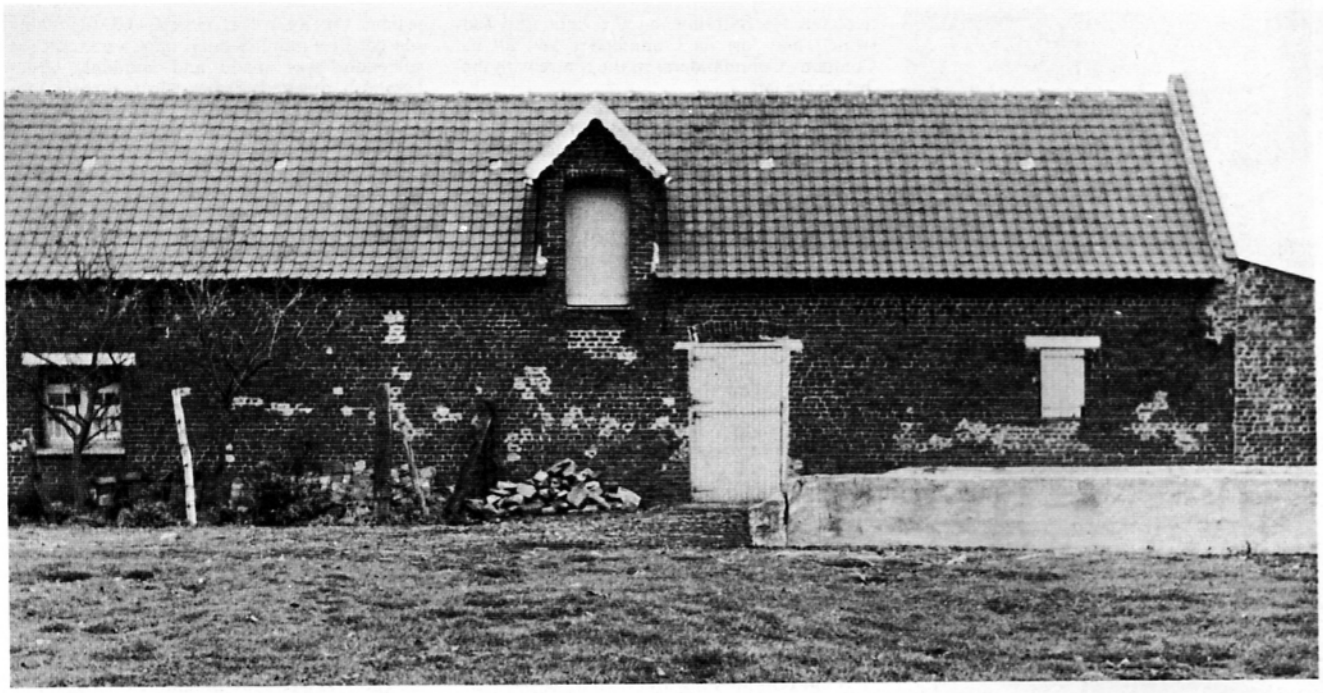
After a considerable time, other Germans appeared and the prisoners, ninety-nine in all, were ordered to line up on the lane in threes. At the command 'Come!', the men marched to the junction with the Rue du Paradis where they were forced to halt by German vehicles and infantrymen proceeding west. Then, wheeling right, they saw the farm of Louis Creton on the left. Just past the farm they were ordered to turn left, through a gate into a field. On their left, as they entered, was a long, brick farm building. In front of it, near the gate was a shallow pit and to the right, two machine-guns had been set up facing the barn wall. The crews behind them were watched by two or three German officers just inside the gate. As the head of the column drew level with the far end of the barn, the order was shouted to 'Feuer!'

There was an immediate crash from the machine guns as each rapidly traversed inwards from either end, sweeping remorsely towards the centre of the column. One Tommy, in the rank nearest the guns, shouted, 'I'm not going to die like this!', and he swung round as if to make a break and escape but the fire caught him and he dropped with the others as they were mown down like ripe corn.

Then, as suddenly as it had started, the firing stopped, the silence broken only by the cries of the wounded. At a word of command, bayonets were fixed and the Germans moved forward. Screams and pistol shots filled the air as the SS troopers moved amongst the heap of bodies in the pit, administering the coup de grace. Then a whistle was blown and an order shouted and the Germans, believing their task completed, climbed out of the pit. But, in their haste and brutality, the SS had failed; incredibly two men, although severely wounded, remained alive. Not daring to move, each believing he was the only survivor, Albert



The door in the cowshed of the Duries Farm through which the Norfolks surrendered.



Pooley and William O'Callaghan lay among the twisted pile of bodies.

It was dark and raining hard when Pooley heard someone snoring not far away. He said, 'I just couldn't believe it at first but I realised that's what it was. It was the strangest sound in the world — but the most comforting. It was Bill.'

O'Callaghan had received two wounds in his arm but had been protected from further bullets by the men in front of him. Pooley had fared worse. Hit four times, twice in one leg, Pooley had recieved two more bullets in the same leg as he lay in the pile. Somehow O'Callaghan managed to extract him from the tangle of bodies and lay him on the sodden grass.

O'Callaghan decided to try to find some cover as one of the farm buildings was burning and, cautiously, he approached another building only to discover through the half-open door several Germans inside cooking a meal. Realising it would be fatal if they, as witnesses to the massacre, were discovered and captured, O'Callaghan returned to Pooley and began to carry and drag his mate across the field, away from the Germans and the flames from the building which cast a lurid glow over the death scene. Stopping to rest several times, they managed to cross a field, then a ditch and into another field of corn before approaching a fence. Behind this they could see the outline of a Dutch barn; although they didn't know it at the time, they had reached the farm of Monsieur Duquenne-Creton, the brother of Louis Creton, who owned the farm next door to where the shooting had taken place. They managed to crawl under the fence to find shelter on some straw under a farm cart. Then, covering themselves with sacks, they fell fast asleep.

It was beginning to get light when O'Callaghan awoke. Pooley was still asleep. There was no sign of human life but he could see that part of the farm had recently been alight and was still smoking. O'Callaghan realised they must find a more secure hiding place and spotted a woodpile in the corner of the yard by the fence. Although the gap between the wood and the hedge gave little shelter from the rain, it was a good hiding place. Pooley was, however, in a bad state. His left leg had been shot to pieces and there was a large hole in it as big as a man's fist, with the raw flesh covered with congealed blood and earth, but O'Callaghan had nothing with which he could treat the wound.

Above: **The line of chest-high bullet marks on the repaired wall of the barn on the Louis Creton farm in 1954 (Cyril Jolly).** *Below:* **The same view in August 1976.**

While they were hiding, a German lorry drove up and began collecting the German dead from the battle which, only now the two British Tommies saw, were lying in the corn field. After the Germans departed, they decided they must find a more-sheltered hiding place and O'Callaghan, after looking around, discovered a pigsty. After ejecting the two occupants and doing his best to clean up the sty, O'Callaghan fetched Pooley from the woodpile. Here they sheltered during the night of May 28, all through Wednesday the 29th until on Thursday, a woman with a young boy entered the farmyard. This was Madame Duquenne-Creton who had left her farm when the fighting had started.

She did the first thing they had feared would happen — began to round up the two pigs. As she entered the pigsty, she let out a scream as she saw a uniformed trouser leg. O'Callaghan jumped to his feet but was too late to stop her run screaming out of the building and down the Rue de Madagascar towards the village. But then she stopped (later she said she realised the uniform was khaki not German field-grey) and re-entered the farmyard. O'Callaghan indicated that they needed food and, although the Germans had posted notices threatening the death penalty for harbouring British soldiers, she returned later with a welcome basket of food.

During the next two days, Madame Duquenne-Creton made further visits to bring food and bandages for their wounds but word

The view from the barn to where the machine guns of the 3rd Infantry Regiment of the SS Totenkopf Division were sited on May 27, 1940.

Above: **The cartshed where Privates William O'Callaghan and Albert Pooley hid during the night after the massacre photographed by Cyril Jolly in 1954.**

Above: **The second hiding place for the two survivors of the massacre was between the fence and this woodpile, still to be seen in 1954 (Cyril Jolly).**

Left: **Madame Duquenne-Creton outside the burnt-out pigsty building.** *Above:* **The pigsty, where Pooley and O'Callaghan hid, since demolished for modernisation.**

soon got around that two British soldiers were being cared for in the village. Realising that their presence might endanger the whole village, Pooley and O'Callaghan decided it would be best if the Germans were told where they were. Pooley's leg was bloated and discoloured and they realised there was a better chance of proper medical treatment if they were taken prisoner. The next day a German motorcycle, followed by a car, arrived at the farm. The German officer (obviously believing they were two ordinary soldiers, wounded in the fighting) explained that there was little he could do for them immediately, being overwhelmed with his own wounded. The next day, however, an ambulance arrived from Bethune Civil Hospital and they were taken into captivity.

O'Callaghan spent the next five years a prisoner-of-war in Poland, whilst Pooley, after undergoing several operations on his leg, was finally repatriated to England via Sweden in April 1943.

When Pooley arrived in England he reported the massacre but his story was received with a certain amount of scepticism. Although he explained there was another survivor who could bear out his story, he refused to give his identity, knowing that if he did so and it was published, it would mean death to O'Callaghan still in enemy hands. When the war came to an end, there was still no official acceptance of his accusations that a German massacre had taken place.

Right: **William O'Callaghan with Madame Duquenne-Creton's son Victor outside the pigsty in 1954 (Cyril Jolly).**

Above: **The mass grave, in the yard of the Louis Creton farm, photographed by Madame Duquenne-Creton. The grave was tended by local French people.** *Right:* **The same view today.**

Not knowing what had become of O'Callaghan, Pooley decided it was up to him to convince the authorities. His health was poor, due to his unhealed leg and severe ulcers, and he realised he may not have long to live. What had to be done must be done quickly. 'I felt I must go back to that meadow and make sure that it had really happened, said Pooley to author Cyril Jolly ten years later, 'My idea was to confirm my story and then report the whole affair to our Regimental authorities. I felt they would want to know what had really happened to the rest of the Battalion. I felt that if I didn't go soon and check my story I would never get the truth established and my pals avenged'.

In his state of health, he knew he was taking a grave risk but he felt he had to go. He obtained a passport and, after a long wait, a seat on a train and boat. After crossing the channel to Calais, he alighted from the train at Hazebrouck and changed to the Bethune train. There he met a family that had befriended him while he was in hospital in France and he managed to arrange transport to Le Paradis. They cruised around for a time until Pooley, who had been looking about on either side, suddenly touched the driver and asked him to stop. He had seen in the distance the house where his Battalion had made its last Headquarters — and its last stand. Duries Farm stood alone, large and conspicuous above the flat hedgeless farmlands.

The car soon drew up at the farmhouse; Pooley got out and looked up at the tall brick house. He limped through the gate and pointed triumphantly to some holes in the wall where bricks had been knocked out and not yet replaced. He had knocked out two himself six years before.

As he hobbled round the farmyard he relived some of the great moments of that fight. In a ditch near the bent tree where O'Callaghan had told him he had disobeyed orders he saw a German and a British helmet lying side by side. Many seasons exposure had rusted them, and the straps were missing. He found other helmets in a heap of rusting scrap metal. One British helmet hung beneath a grindstone and was used for whetting the stone.

There were not many signs of war; a corrugated iron fence near the barn was pierced with bullet holes, and a gable was stopped with iron that looked as though it had been in the fire and the outside walls of the cowshed showed signs of repair where shells had struck them. The pond in the centre of the courtyard had been filled in; probably rubble from the house had been dumped in it. The cowhouse seemed little changed. He then walked out through the same doorway that had once led to captivity and unimaginable horror. He emerged — not with his hands above his head this time — and stood in the meadow.

Pooley stood silent for a few moments, then turned and went to thank the French lady for allowing him to look round. He noticed that the interior of the house was unfinished and the tiled floor of the old farmhouse was still there, cracked and uneven — a souvenir of their last stand.

From the Duries Farm they walked one hundred and fifty paces along the Rue du Paradis and turned into the by-road, the Rue de Madagascar, with the car following them. The farmhouse was being entirely rebuilt.

As he limped into the yard he saw Madame Duquenne-Creton. She was much altered. The terrible years of labour and struggle had considerably aged her. At the same instant Madame saw him and recognised him.

Her delight at seeing his solid though thin form was some reward for Pooley's journey. She embraced him, laughed and wept. Then she took the two men to see her husband, who had been in the French Army at the time of the German invasion.

They found him loading potatoes on to a trailer in the very field where the prisoners had been stripped of their equipment. Helping the farmer was a young giant, Victor, Madame's son. He turned when his mother entered the field with her companions and, after staring at Pooley, came forward with outstretched hand saying in English 'I know you.'

Pooley, six feet tall, grasped the hand of the young man and looked up at him. 'Could this really be the lad who had brought him and O'Callaghan so many meals in the pigsty in 1940?' he thought.

Then they all went along the road to the farm of Louis Creton. The little group stopped at the gateway through which the column of British prisoners had marched to their deaths. Pooley had a lump in his throat as he thought of the events of that lovely May day. Yet there was a thrill of satisfaction, for, although the farmhouse had been rebuilt and a new iron gate had replaced the wooden one, this was just as he pictured it, just as he had seen it in his mind's eye by day and in his dreams at night.

The small meadow was much the same. He could see the spot where the guns had stood with the hedge behind them. But the place where he had fallen did not look the same — the pit was no longer there. There was a deep drain near the farmhouse and this was roughly wired in; near the barn, however, the ground had been levelled. When he asked about it, the Cretons told him that thirty of his comrades had been hastily buried in the pit by the Germans but the French had laid all the bodies in a common grave a few yards away. Ninety-seven bodies had been interred and a brief service read by the French priest. The grave had been fenced with posts and wire to keep away cattle, a cross was set up and the steel helmets of the men were spaced around the edge. Through the long years of the Occupation the villagers had tended it, and Jeanne and Madeleine, Louis Creton's daughters, had spent hours there. Flowers from cottage and farmhouse gardens had been brought, and village children gathered posies to put in jars.

Pooley walked up to the red brick wall of the stables alone. His companion watched him, sensing what the moment meant to him. He looked over the wall then took a knife from his pocket, dug into the brickwork, prised two bullets from the places where they had been embedded, and slipped them into his pocket. He later compared them with one of those removed from his leg in hospital; they were identical.

The car then took them to the British cemetery in the shadow of the church where so many of the Battalion had fought to the last. Pooley entered the little hedged plot with its rows of wooden crosses. There were bunches of fresh flowers lying here and there, for the village folk still remembered. Pooley began reading the names on the crosses, down the rows and back again until he reached the far corner and there, in the shadow of the hedge, was the Commanding Officer's grave.

Above: **The remains were exhumed by the French from May 1-15, 1942 for reburial behind the local churchyard. Only about fifty bodies could be identified.** *Below:* **The yard today, photographed from the hay-loft door; the road is the Rue du Paradis.**

The grave of the C.O., Major L. C. D. Ryder, in the corner of the cemetery.

Above: **The bodies of the Norfolks were reburied in a separate plot behind Le Paradis church subsequently laid out with Commonwealth War Grave headstones.**

Left: The barn wall at the Louis Creton farm, showing repairs to the brickwork where it was hit by German bullets photographed in 1954 by Cyril Jolly. *Above:* The plaque was unveiled in 1970 and the wall faced over with cement three years later.

Returning to the farm, Madame made coffee while Pooley walked round the farm-yard. The buildings surrounding the courtyard, although repaired, were easily recognisable. He stood under the Dutch barn which had offered them its shelter when their need was greatest. There was still a wagon in it and bales of straw. He walked into the passageway and looked at the pigsty which had sheltered him and O'Callaghan for so many days. A couple of pigs now occupied it. Pooley was not envious. He remembered every brick of that sty — the half-circular window and the brick ceiling, and the feeding hole through which he had stared hour after hour. If only he had lain the other way he might just have seen into the courtyard, but once he was laid in the sty it had been too great an effort to move, so he had either stared up at the ceiling, or O'Callaghan had propped him against the wall and he had stared through the feeding hole. It seemed incredible that for nine days he had lain there.

Meanwhile, unknown to Pooley, the wheels of authority were slowly grinding into action. The newly constituted War Crimes Investigation Unit, under its chief Lieutenant-Colonel A. P. Scotland (the wartime head of the POW interrogation unit in Kensington Palace Gardens, London), had got wind of a possible war crime at Le Paradis from the French Authorities. Investigating officers visited the site and photographed the bullet-scarred wall, the original communal grave site and saw the graves in the churchyard. From Madame Duquenne-Creton they learned that two British soldiers had survived the massacre. At the same time, other investigators traced the German units involved in the fighting at Le Paradis in 1940 — the SS Totenkopf (Death's Head) Division — and all prisoners-of-war from that unit were interrogated. More than one hundred SS officers and men were processed before thirty were identified as being in the locality at the time. By now, the field of suspicion had narrowed to No. 3 Company of the Totenkopf 2nd Infantry Regiment and it was believed that the Company Commander, the then Hauptsturmfuehrer Fritz Knoechlein was the man behind the outrage. Knoechlein had not yet been apprehended and it was not until the winter of 1946 that he was tracked down in Germany. He was brought to London and interrogated by Lieutenant-Colonel Scotland.

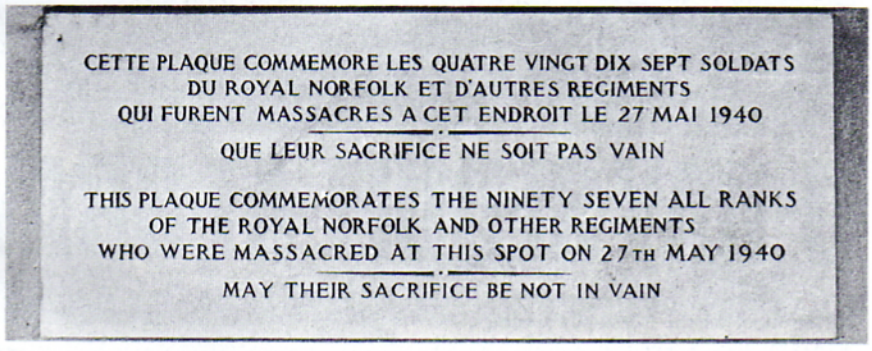
Scotland had already enquired of the Royal Norfolk Regiment about possible survivors of their 2nd Battalion and received the names of Pooley and O'Callaghan. When Lieutenant-Colonel Scotland asked Pooley why he had not

SS-Obersturmbannfuehrer Fritz Knoechlein, pictured wearing the Ritterkreuz, which he was awarded on November 16, 1944.

William O'Callaghan and Albert Pooley arrive at Hamburg station to attend the War Crimes trial held in the Curiohaus.

Above: **A reunion, fourteen years after the massacre, for William O'Callaghan (second from left) and the Duquenne-Creton family (Cyril Jolly).**

Above: **William O'Callaghan and Madame Duquenne-Creton unveil the plaque on May 27, 1970, in the presence of members of the Dunkirk Veterans' Association (Cyril Jolly).**


CETTE PLAQUE COMMEMORE LES QUATRE VINGT DIX SEPT SOLDATS
DU ROYAL NORFOLK ET D'AUTRES REGIMENTS
QUI FURENT MASSACRES A CET ENDROIT LE 27 MAI 1940
QUE LEUR SACRIFICE NE SOIT PAS VAIN
THIS PLAQUE COMMEMORATES THE NINETY SEVEN ALL RANKS
OF THE ROYAL NORFOLK AND OTHER REGIMENTS
WHO WERE MASSACRED AT THIS SPOT ON 27TH MAY 1940
MAY THEIR SACRIFICE BE NOT IN VAIN

reported the war crime when he was repatriated, Pooley of course told him that he had — in 1943 and had been disbelieved. Colonel Scotland was furious when he heard this and describes in the book 'The London Cage' how he made every effort to trace the officer responsible. For Pooley it was a relief to know that at last he was not being told to forget his fantastic tale and that something was now being done.

The trial of Fritz Knoechlein began in the Curiohaus in Hamburg on October 11, 1948. Pooley and O'Callaghan were called as witnesses together with a number of former SS men who had fought in Le Paradis in 1940. One French woman, Madame Romanie Castel, who had been accosted by Knoechlein at the Delometz-Decourcelles farm, 150 yards from the site of the shooting, dramatically identified Knoechlein in court. The defence argued that the shooting had been a legal execution following the decision of a military court which had found the British at Le Paradis were guilty of using 'dum-dum' ammunition.

The trial continued for twelve days and much of the transcript is reprinted by Cyril Jolly in his excellent book on the massacre, 'The Vengeance of Private Pooley'. (Although Cyril Jolly's book has long been out of print, due to many requests, he is publishing it himself in paperback form in March 1977. Readers interested in purchasing a copy should send £1.60, which includes postage, to the author at Teazel Patch, Gressenhall, Dereham, Norfolk). At 3.00 p.m. on October 25, the President of the court, Lieutenant Colonel E. C. Van der Kiste of the Essex Regiment, pronounced the verdict: 'Fritz Knoechlein, the court sentences you to death by hanging'. The sentence was carried out three months later in Hamburg — on January 28, 1949.

Three years later, Pooley was too ill to re-visit Le Paradis with Cyril Jolly whilst researching his book so O'Callaghan alone returned with Jolly for the first time in thirteen years. Together, they retraced the fateful route from the Duries farm and O'Callaghan met again Madame Duquenne-Creton.

In 1961, the Creton farm (which had been rebuilt in 1953) changed hands and the new owner, Maurice Dufour-Flament, planted lines of poplar trees on the site of the massacre and renamed the farm 'Les Peupliers'. Monsieur Dufour-Flament felt a memorial plaque should be affixed to the bullet-scarred barn wall and the Dunkirk Veterans Association agreed. This was unveiled on May 27, 1970 in the presence of Private William O'Callaghan. Sadly, he died in November 1975 during our research on this story. When we visited Le Paradis in August 1976, we were made very welcome by Madame Dufour-Flament and she showed us the massacre site, now just another field on an ordinary French farm. Unfortunately, to our way of thinking, the wall was faced over with cement in 1973 to 'preserve it'. During modernisation on the Duquenne-Creton farm the old pig-sty, where Pooley and O'Callaghan had sheltered, was demolished but its approximate position is indicated on our aerial photograph. Today the graves of the ninety-seven Norfolks lie in neat graves in the nearby War Cemetery of Le Paradis. The one survivor, Albert Pooley, whose persistence finally brought the perpetrator to justice, still lives in London — his health broken by the frightful experience of his ordeal.

Cyril Jolly, author of 'The Vengeance of Private Pooley', with Albert Pooley, William O'Callaghan and Lord Russell of Liverpool, CBE, MC, at the function held to launch the book in 1954. (London News Agency).

AFTER THE BATTLE

WRECK RECOVERY

D-DAY SEQUEL AT GRAYE-SUR-MER

In the very first edition of *After the Battle*, in our story on the Normandy landings, we described how a Churchill AVRE (Assault Vehicle Royal Engineers) Petard tank carrying a fascine, of the 26th Assault Squadron, was immobilised and later buried in a crater on the main exit road from Mike sector of Juno beach.

Major (now Major-General) A. E. Younger, DSO, OBE, the commander of 26 Assault Squadron, Royal Engineers, on D-Day described how this happened in a 1946 report:

'The main natural anti-tank obstacle was a line of sand dunes mostly about 12 to 15 feet high. Behind this was a strip 200 to 400 yards wide of low lying land, which could be, and had been, flooded by damming a stream which ran through it. Beyond this strip was a lateral road and beyond that again the only obstacles were mines. The dammed stream flowed under the proposed exit at a small culvert. This had been heavily cratered forming a 63 foot gap in the exit. There were craters also present all along the length of the stream — they were all, of course, full of water so that only the lips could be seen. In addition, a large tank trap had been dug in the centre of the exit, about which previous warning had been given from air photos. This was about 16 feet wide and 9 feet deep.

'The exit at which the half squadron was landed was 900 yards west of Courseulles. At 0759 hours, 1 Tp started flailing straight up to the exit which had been mined and at 0805 hours, 2 Tp laid their bridge against the sand dunes to the west of the gap. They experienced some difficulty in releasing the bridge, which was at an angle of 45 degrees, but eventually were successful and, following the bridge AVRE, which drew off to one side, the first flails went up. The first flail started flogging at the top of the dunes and went about 40 yards into the minefield when a mine exploded under its track. The tank following it was a flail whose jib had already been damaged by a craft obstacle. These two were now useless as flails and remained in the minefield giving covering fire. They were later joined by a third flail, whose boom had broken, whilst the bridge AVRE returned to the beach. The remaining tanks of 2 Tp now left this exit and concentrated on the main one.

Top: **Juno beach at Graye-sur-Mer in June 1944 photographed by Sergeant Morris (IWM). It was from this beach that the main exit road from Mike sector ran inland across the cratered culvert.** *Above:* **The same view, showing the D-Day memorial at the head of the exit, during the ceremony on November 27, 1976.**

'The 1 Tp flails had now reached the prepared tank trap. They drew aside from this and allowed 2 Tp to drop an eight-foot fascine into it. They then crossed over the gap and flogged up to the main obstacle of waterlogged craters. Not realising the full extent of the gap to be bridged, OC 1 Tp — Capt. E. J. Hewitt — ordered up his fascine tank with the idea of filling in the supposedly cratered culvert. This tank slid into the crater and gradually disappeared from view except for its fascine. The crew of six succeeded in getting out, but three were killed (L/Sgt Ashton, the commander, and Sprs Manley and Battson) and the other three severely wounded by mortar fire before they could make the cover of the sand dunes. The latter three were evacuated to the UK that afternoon.

'The sequence of operations that followed were, firstly, the fascine was released from the sunken AVRE by placing explosive charges on the retaining steel wire. Great credit is due to Capt. Hewitt and his men, who at this stage had to work in the open to fix these charges, L/Sgt Snelling and L/Cpl Gall being particularly worthy of mention.

'Secondly, the 1 Tp bridge was dropped

An American Air Force reconnaissance photograph taken by No 27 Squadron, USAAF, at 7.00 p.m. on D-Day from 5,500 feet of the main Mike sector exit (Keele University).

from the seaward side on to the sunken tank which acted as a pier. Beyond this was the now released fascine. The gap was still incomplete on the far side, so the OC organized the available troops on the beach to bring up logs, which had been dumped nearby by the Germans, presumably for use as craft obstacles. Gradually and with the help of chespale fascines from various sources, a causeway was built out and, at about 0915 hours, the first DD tank got across close behind the assaulting companies. Six tanks were got across before the bridge started to slide off the turret of the sunken AVRE. Traffic therefore had to be stopped while the bridge was chocked up and improved.

'Another four tanks then got across until a 17 pdr Sherman slightly misjudged the track across the logs on the far side and became bogged. He was towed out by L/Sgt. Snelling's tank which had been the first across, and the opportunity was taken to bring up further logs.

'The next incident was that of the first SP gun which totally misjudged the bridge, and bellied itself firmly on it in such a way that when its tracks turned they could grip nothing. Three bulldozers were linked together but failed to pull it off, two AVREs were therefore brought up, and after a lot of trouble succeeded in getting it off. During this time a horse and cart had been "acquired" from a disinterested farmer and was impressed into bringing rubble from damaged houses to the gap.

'The work proceeded steadily under OC 2 Tp, Capt. Hendry; traffic was leaving the beach with occasional breaks of two or three minutes when fresh cart loads of rubble were brought up. The work here was finally handed over to the Beach Gp in the afternoon, when the AVRE crews were withdrawn.'

We were, therefore, extremely interested when Captain J. C. G. Cragg of the present day 26 Armoured Engineer Squadron, based at Hohne in Germany (part of the 1st Division of BAOR), wrote to us early in 1976 with details of the Army's plan to recover the AVRE.

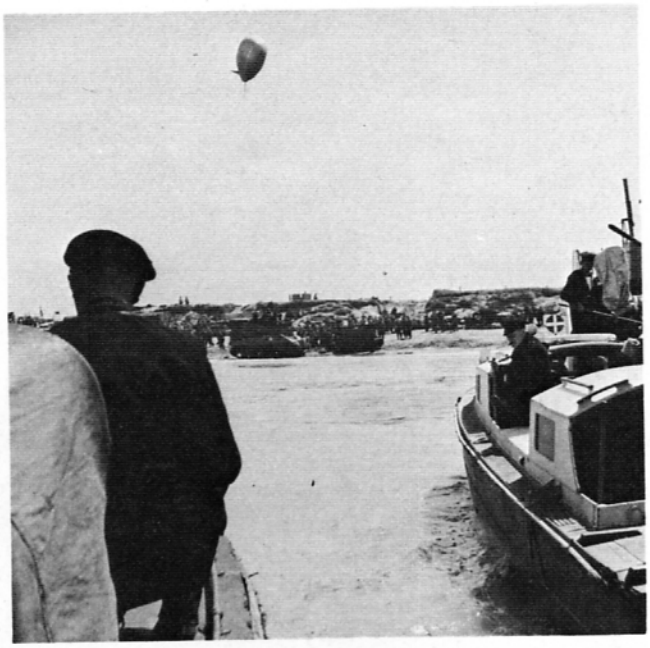
Captain Cragg sent us an impressive, thirty-two page copy of Exercise 'Veterans Revival II' in which our story was cited as documentary evidence of the AVRE's existence under the road. Both Major-General Younger and Sapper Bill Dunn, the driver, had been contacted and asked what ordnance might render recovery of the AVRE hazardous. Major-General Younger thought it would still contain its full load of 26 Petard 'Flying Dustbin' bombs and possibly 26 General Wade charges (hand-placed explosives for demolishing concrete).

Sapper Dunn wrote that 'there should also be rifles in the tank and these will probably be loaded. Mine was just behind my seat with a Bren gun near to it. If the bins on the outside of the turret are still in reasonable condition, you should find inside the tools for the tank, the crews greatcoats and fourteen days rations for the crew (if you are hungry!) but no ammunition!

Captain Cragg and Captain W. D. Edmonds, MBE, RE, had already made an initial recce of the site (at map reference GR 3OU XV8367) from November 20-24, 1975. During their visit to Graye, local French

The road over the buried Churchill AVRE as we photographed it in June 1973.

This main exit from Mike sector beach was used by all the top personalities landing on the British beaches in Normandy after D-Day. General Montgomery (photographed here by Sergeant Morris on June 8 talking to Lieutenant-Colonel W. J. Humphrey) was probably unaware that he would be driving over a buried tank when he left the beach (IWM).



So too, no doubt, was the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, (also photographed by Sergeant Morris) as he approached the same beach exit four days later (IWM).

officials indicated that the town would be in favour of recovery of the AVRE for subsequent restoration by BAOR.

The next step in the detailed plan, prepared by the two Royal Engineers officers, was to organise a confirmatory recce so that, before committing considerable engineer and recovery effort to France, two points could be established beyond doubt:

a) The AVRE did exist.

b) The condition of the AVRE justified its subsequent recovery.

The recce party, consisting of one officer (Captain Munro), one NCO and six other ranks, left Germany in two Land-Rovers and trailers in March 1976. After arrival at the site, the exact location of the AVRE was established by drilling holes at 2ft centres over the area using a Hi-cycle tool bit. The turret of the AVRE, only inches below the road level, was exposed; measurements were taken and a detailed drawing prepared.

It was therefore with great enthusiasm that we jumped at Captain Cragg's invitation to be present at the excavation which was planned for November 15-December 3, 1976. It was not possible to plan an earlier date as the Class 15 road is heavily used as a route to the beach during the tourist season.

The detailed Army plan set out the basic objects of the plan:

a) Phase I. Move to the exercise area, uncover the AVRE with sufficient working area to allow recovery as planned by HQ REME 1 Division.

b) Phase II. Recovery of the AVRE to BAOR for refurbishment. Dependant upon condition, this will be done by the RE if it is within their scope.

c) Phase III. Return the road to original condition with the exception of wearing surface. (To be laid by the French authorities.)

It should be explained that as the Royal Engineers are not equipped with the specialised plant necessary to recover tanks, 7 Field Workshop of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, based at Fallingbostel (near Hohne in Germany), were detailed to assist in this part of the operation. The REME party would be led by Captain P. North, OC No. 4 Platoon.

The plant allocated for the operation included two AEC 35-ton recovery tractors; two 20-ton Crusader low-loaders; a Muir-Hill excavator with a Drott 4-in-1 bucket; a Somag road-roller and a bitumen sprayer to renew the road after the recovery operation. Additional items included generators, cutting torches, pumps and digging tools. As Army vehicles do not stop at garages to fill up with fuel, all petrol, oil and lubricants (POL in Army jargon) was to be carried in a four-tonner and trailer. The thirty-seven officers and men involved would travel in Land-Rovers and two four-tonners.

A complete civil engineering plan was drawn up for the reconstruction of the road which was to be renewed with sand (from the nearby dunes) compacted by oil-stabilisation (for which 1800 litres of waste oil would be carried to the site from Germany).

Sergeant Morris photographed King George VI preparing to leave the beach by the same exit on June 16, 1944 (IWM.)

Captain P. C. Gray, ex-85 Field Coy. R.E.,2/IC of the unit that had concreted over the AVRE in 1944, photographed the eastern side of the culvert and part of the exposed tank in 1955. In 1969, the road subsided and the opening was filled in.

Sergeant Soutar, REME, watches Staff-Sergeant Tyndall, RE, begin the preliminary excavation in March 1976 (P. Leslie).

The turret of the AVRE is uncovered, only nine inches below the road surface, for the first time in over thirty years (P. Leslie).

We arrived at the tented army camp, which had been pitched a few hundred yards from the excavation site, at noon on Wednesday, November 24. We were shown a fascinating collection of relics already recovered from the AVRE which included a Sten gun, unusual 100-round Bren gun drum magazines, compo rations of beef and chocolate (the latter as good as new) and personal kit belonging to the crew. The manufacturers plate removed from the AVRE confirmed it to be a Mk IV manufactured in February 1944 with the War Department No. T31419/C. Some of the 600 lbs of explosives being carried in the tank (General Wade charges and Petard bombs) had already been recovered by Major Mike Hoy of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps and this was spread out in a specially-dug trench. All the explosives were later detonated by the French authorities near Omaha beach.

We then drove to the AVRE which lay, half-uncovered, in a muddy hole which had been dug on the site of the culvert by the Royal Engineers. Sections of box-girder bridge, logs and rubble were evident in the sides of the excavation where 85 Field Company RE had filled in the hole in 1944. The edge of the 6-inch, reinforced-concrete slab, which had permanently sealed the AVRE in its tomb by D+7, was also visible.

The actual recovery of the AVRE was, however, an example of how the most carefully laid plans can go awry. After the first few pulls by the 'wreckers' had failed to shift it, it was obvious that the Churchill was bedded more firmly than had been anticipated. In 1944, the AVRE had literally been a stepping-stone for all the armour leaving the beach and the million or more tons of post-war private traffic, using the same road to reach the beach, had all combined to set the AVRE firmly in its grave. The stream flowing under, round and through the tank could not have helped.

The correct recovery equipment for a tank bogged to this degree would be a Centurian ARV (i.e. another tank) but, as one was not available, the REME had to try to improvise with the equipment on hand. After the spade anchors on the AEC 'wreckers' refused to hold the winches firm, a ground-anchor was laid and connected to the front of the vehicles.

A ground anchor consists of two perforated metal bars linked in the shape of 'V' into which twenty-four, two-foot steel pins are hammered in the ground. Each pair of pins should give one ton of anchorage but, when the signal to winch was given, a huge, triangular section of roadway pulled up with the pins!

Above: **Between March and November 1976, the AVRE was covered over again to allow summer tourists to reach the beach. Here the REs have uncovered the tank whilst the REME fitters prepare to attach their cables.** *Below:* **Seeing is believing!**

With an audience of two or three hundred French people most of the time, there were more than enough suggestions as to what should be done! An offer of assistance from the local boatyard at Courseulles was translated to the REME by 'Major' Peter Gray of the Military Vehicle Conservation Group (who had joined the *After the Battle* party for the trip). Peter Gray, with his technical experience and mastery of the French language, soon became the liaison man between the French and the Army. Captain Edmonds and Captain North, whilst naturally wanting to complete the recovery themselves, appreciated they were in a jam and the offer of French help, so willingly given, was accepted.

Thus began a combined Anglo-French operation to raise the AVRE in which more and more equipment, cables and pulleys were brought to bear. By Friday evening, there was only time for one last pull before the veterans and guests were due to arrive. The beast lay in its pit, bathed in the glare of spotlights, an eerie spectacle which seemed to give the AVRE a will of its own not to submit. Because of the danger of a cable break to the French civilians who were milling around the site, the Captain had to adopt a subterfuge to clear the area: he announced that work was ceasing for the night. Then, quietly passing the word to his men, they dispersed only to creep back an hour later. The danger of a snapped cable had been dramatically illustrated to us earlier

Above left: **Major Mike Hoy, RAOC, prepares to tickle a General Wade charge with a penknife!** *Top right:* **One of the 4oz 808 Plastic explosive charges, many of which were leaking nitroglycerine.** *Above right:* **A 1lb prepared demolition charge. Altogether there were more than 600lbs of all kinds of explosives in the AVRE.**

Left: **Corporal Restarick shows the Sten gun after cleaning. All the parts were functional except the recoil spring.** *Above:* **Some of the varied items of equipment recovered from the Churchill (not the Carlsberg!).**

Above: **Assembling a 40lb Petard bomb beside a Churchill AVRE in 1944.** *Right:* **This was the condition of the twenty-six bombs and fins removed from the tank.**

Left: **Ex-Sapper Bill Dunn, the driver of the AVRE in 1944, points to the sunken Churchill with the other survivor, Bill Hawkins.** *Above:* **The graves, in Bayeux War cemetery, Plot 15 Row A, of the three crew killed after evacuating the tank, Sapper Roy Manley (grave 3), Sapper Alf Battson (grave 4) and Lance-Sergeant Cecil Ashton (grave 5).**

when an inch cable parted with a bang, causing a hundred feet of writhing steel to flail and spark in a chilling display of unleashed power.

However this last attempt to shift the AVRE also failed, although having an estimated pull-strength of 120 tons and in spite of the fact that the tracks had been cut at the front and rear. Cutting torches had been brought to bear on the tracks earlier in the day as it was felt that if the engine was still in gear they may be holding the tank firm. This decision was looked on with dismay by the preservation-minded editor. It seemed impossible that a forty-ton tank could withstand such efforts to move it.

There was now nothing more that could be done before the official ceremony took place the next day. In fact the two surviving veterans of the tank, Bill Dunn and Bill Hawkins, were pleased to see their AVRE still 'in situ' and it was a moving moment as they showed their wives the items of kit displayed nearby, which they had abandoned thirty-two years previously. This table stood almost on the spot where they had both been wounded in a salvo of mortar bombs just after they had left the sinking tank. Bill Dunn, the driver, lost two limbs in the explosions and Bill Hawkins an eye and another veteran, ex-Captain Hendry, OC of No. 2 troop, pointed out to the editor where they had buried the three crew members who had been killed — just beside the road to the crossroads.

In a ceremony at the beach memorial, the local Mayor of Graye-sur-Mer, Monsieur Michel Grimaud welcomed the twenty-five veterans who had returned and Major-General Younger, DSO, OBE, replied on behalf of the ex-servicemen.

Then came the fitting climax to a memorable day. A Monsieur J. R. Desmeziere of Caen had generously offered the use of his massive 70-ton crane completely free of charge. The local gendarmes agreed to turn a blind-eye to its transport to the beach site (it being forbidden to move such a large load on French roads at a weekend) and we waited in excitement as the crane was assembled and the huge strops were fitted to the rear of the AVRE. The strain was taken up and, to the whirring of TV cameras and the clicking of shutters, the suction which had held the tank immobile was broken and it rose majestically from its pit. Almost cheekily, the crane driver dangled it like a Dinky toy, dripping petrol, oil and mud, before depositing it neatly on the roadway. The great recovery was over.

This Petard-armed Churchill AVRE is believed to be the only one of its kind in existence. The Mayor of Graye-sur-Mer has since decided that it will be refurbished by the French Army to be set up as a fitting memorial beside the crossroad at Graye — a place it never reached in life but where it will rest permanently in death.